

USAF SUPPORT TO LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT:

THREE CASE STUDIES FROM THE 1980s

BY

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Abstract

This monograph provides a review of USAF support to low intensity conflict (LIC). The author describes the evolution and current state of low intensity conflict doctrine in the US Air Force and then provides three case studies from US military actions in the 1980's. Each case study discusses the background of the conflict, describes USAF operations to support these low intensity conflict operations, and identifies the important "lessons learned" from each. These case studies show four areas that require increased service attention: service acceptance of doctrine encompassing LIC support, development of service wide capability to carry out LIC support missions, joint planning and exercises of LIC support operations, and improved command and control for these operations. These areas require increased service emphasis to improve USAF effectiveness in future low intensity conflict. The author discusses each area in terms of specific recommendations for institutionalizing USAF support to low intensity conflict operations.

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1. Introduction

The US military has struggled to deal with conflicts short of war. These low intensity conflicts (LIC) have proven to be difficult to predict and equally difficult to solve. As a part of the US military, the US Air Force is required to work with the other services when they plan and execute LIC operations. Because low intensity conflicts do not fit the traditional USAF view of conventional conflict, the US Air Force has attempted to adapt its traditional doctrine, systems and employment concepts to support low intensity conflict operations.

This study will examine three recent US military operations that fall within the definition of LIC. The US military has jointly defined LIC as

political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments. Low intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications.¹

To resolve this form of conflict, our nation has several instruments at its disposal, such as political actions, economic actions and military actions. Despite the seemingly lower level of violence on a global scale that these conflicts represent, low intensity conflicts require careful application of the appropriate combination of all these instruments.² Airpower, especially land-based airpower of the US Air Force (USAF), represents a rapid, flexible and powerful force which is needed to assist national leadership in conflict

¹Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Official Dictionary of Military Terms, Second Edition*, Irvine, CA: Global Professional Publications, 1992, 212. Also called JCS Pub 1-02.

²David R. Mets, *Land-Based Air Power in Third World Crisis*, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1986, 12.

resolution in war and in LIC.³ The decade of the 1980's provided several LIC challenges in which US leadership called upon USAF units to respond.

This research is intended to define how USAF's experience in support of low intensity conflict in the 1980's prepared the service for future LIC operations. From the three case studies I have selected, I will describe the relevant background of each conflict, the USAF operations that were conducted in support of US strategy in each conflict, and summarize the lessons learned for future USAF LIC support operations. After reviewing these case studies and their accompanying lessons learned, I will provide an analysis of how these lessons have been incorporated into current USAF doctrine, strategy and operations. With this analysis, I will discuss my view of low intensity conflict challenges which USAF could most likely face in the future. This research will allow air power practitioners to define USAF doctrine more clearly, to recommend improvements to our force structure to deal more effectively with these conflicts, and to gain insight on how best to employ air power in an unstable world.

I have chosen three cases studies that represent both positive and negative aspects of USAF support of LIC: Operation Urgent Fury, Operation Blast Furnace, and Operation Just Cause. Operation Urgent Fury involved the rescue of American Medical students from Grenada in October-November 1983. As an ad hoc operation, Operation Urgent Fury highlights the mismatch of our post-Vietnam employment of military power with low intensity conflict. Additionally, Operation Urgent Fury allows us to see how well our no-notice capability to employ airpower worked in a conflict short of war. Operation Urgent Fury highlights the problem of command and control of air forces in LIC support operations. These experiences influenced the employment of airpower throughout the ensuing decade.

³Ibid., 8.

The second case study focuses on how USAF operations supported the US Army in an effort to interdict the drug market in Bolivia. Operation Blast Furnace, conducted in 1986, was a small operation in terms of personnel deployed and equipment employed. Although it received little notice in the United States, Operation Blast Furnace made a dramatic impact on the host nation's political and economic environment. Operation Blast Furnace demonstrated the operational and political difficulties of joint and combined operations on another nation's soil. USAF airlift supported the army's effort to strike a blow to the drug trade and, despite the small amount of missions, airpower was central to mission accomplishment.

The third case study, Operation Just Cause, discusses the operation which was conducted to capture the indicted dictator, Manuel Noriega, and restore democracy to Panama. This case study provides a view of USAF support to LIC operations at the end of the decade. USAF's operations in Panama were similar to Operation Urgent Fury, but had the added benefit of planning and exercise before execution.

The important questions of whether or not doctrine matches USAF's operations, how well the USAF faces LIC as a service, and what changes are needed to improve USAF support of LIC operations can be investigated in each case. These case studies should also help us to understand more clearly the employment of airpower in LIC by showing the relationship of these "dirty little wars" to how USAF organizes, trains, and equips to fight the air campaign. To learn how well USAF's actual operations have responded to LIC, we need to define more clearly what LIC is, discuss the evolution of USAF LIC doctrine, and examine how USAF views LIC.

I have made several assumptions in my approach to this research. First, I chose to use official USAF histories to understand how the service views its role in these conflicts. Most of these histories remain classified, therefore, some of the specific details concerning the more sensitive aspects of these histories are not included in this paper. By using first person accounts of the events, I hope to give a fuller understanding of what

occurred for the official histories presented in unclassified form. My research focuses on two peacetime contingency operations and support of counter-drug operation, thereby covering a limited scope of the possible operations that have been conducted in support of low intensity conflict .

What is LIC?

FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, defines LIC as a “political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states.”⁴ This definition clearly reflects the DOD definition. This concept of war is important because of the regional and global implications to the US and other nations, such as the potential loss of access to vital resources, restriction of trade, or direct threats to allies. LIC can be a significant challenge to our international credibility when no direct threat to our national survival exists. The challenge of LIC is dealing with these conflicts on a case-by-case basis. This requires a great deal of proper coordination of many US agencies, international governments, and non-government organizations. Civilian LIC experts have defined LIC as

a set of constrained political, psychological, economic and military activities performed or sponsored by the US government in order to facilitate the evolution of a stable, non-hostile third world environment and obviate the need to commit US armed forces to war.⁵

LIC operations should foster the accomplishment of US national strategic objectives, such as assisting the growth of democracy and commerce, providing regional stability, promoting economic advancement of poorer nations, and protecting human rights. Low

⁴FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, Washington, DC, 5 December 1990, 1-1.

⁵Crane et al, *Between Peace and War*, 4.

intensity conflict takes many forms, but can be divided into four categories: support for insurgency and counterinsurgency, combating terrorism, peacekeeping operations, and peacetime contingency operations.

Insurgency, the first area of LIC, is defined as “an organized, armed political struggle whose goal may be the seizure of power through revolutionary takeover and replacement of the existing government.”⁶ US support of insurgencies can include organizing, training and equipping forces to carry out guerrilla or unconventional warfare, psychological warfare operations, intelligence gathering, and institutional and infrastructure development.⁷ Counterinsurgency support allows the US government to assist a local foreign government by identifying the problems within its country, and taking the required “political, economic and social actions to redress them.”⁸

FM 100-20 points out that the role for US forces in these situations is best determined by applying the principles of Internal Defense and Development (IDAD) strategy, which stresses the support role versus direct intervention. The key for US’ efforts in the IDAD strategy is to build up a local capability to “solve the problem” without massive commitment of US troops and the potential loss of life that direct combat would bring. The additional benefit of this strategy is the removal of the vision of US forces acting as an invading imperial power over both friends and foes of the conflict.

Combating terrorism is another important aspect of low-intensity conflict.⁹ While the lack of a stated doctrine has not prevented USAF units from taking part in missions to respond to terrorist acts, the inclusion of combating terrorism in LIC doctrine

⁶Op Cit., 2-0.

⁷Ibid., p 2-17.

⁸Ibid., p 2-18.

⁹Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Official Dictionary of Military Terms, Second Edition*, Irvine, CA: Global Professional Publications, 1992, 370, defines terrorism as “the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives.”

is significant.¹⁰ Terrorism had been primarily perceived as a political act which required a political response; however, as worldwide acts of terror began to threaten directly the US' ability to achieve national objectives, American leadership looked to the military to develop the means to defend against this threat. The addition of combating terrorism to the list of low intensity conflicts presents certain challenges. The USAF has approached this mission in a number of ways from the more obvious Operation Eldorado Canyon to the less publicized internal anti-terrorism program. Monitoring and timely warning of terrorist activities, internal security measures, education, intelligence gathering and dissemination form the basis of the USAF anti terrorist system.

In addition to terrorism, low intensity conflict in the immediate past has heightened the need for peacekeeping. Peacekeeping, whether in Somalia, Bosnia or Iraq, can be composed of several missions, e.g. withdrawal, disengagement and cease-fire enforcement, POW exchanges, arms control inspections, demilitarization, and demobilization. All of these missions are operations short of war. USAF personnel have been directly involved in the support of United Nations efforts as well as other bilateral agreements that require peacekeeping. Enforcement of no-fly zones in Bosnia and Iraq, airlifting food supplies to Somalia, and providing logistics and intelligence support to UN observation missions in over 30 locations worldwide are just some of the many peacekeeping missions USAF personnel and force structure are currently tasked to accomplish. These operations provide stability by allowing trained personnel to use their skills, capabilities and equipment in support of LIC operations during peacetime.

¹⁰Notably in USAF recent history, Operation Eldorado Canyon was executed in 1986 in response to the confirmed involvement of Libya in a terrorist bombing of a night club in Berlin, Germany killing a US citizen. Conventional weapons used in a LIC environment can achieve impressive results. In this case, a dramatic drop in terrorist acts carried out in Europe by Middle East groups was noted in the period following the operation. Most knowledgeable sources give the raid at least partial credit.

Peacetime contingency operations, the fourth area of LIC described in FM 100-20, encompasses more than nine separate types of conflict short of war.¹¹ USAF assets are frequently selected for these missions due to their inherent flexibility, speed and range, as “peacetime contingency operations are politically and time sensitive.”¹² Air dropping food to besieged civilians in Bosnia, airlifting weapons and ammunition to Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and counter-drug surveillance flights by Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft are examples of the wide variety of peacetime contingency support provided by USAF units.

Evolution of LIC Doctrine

Doctrine for military forces involved in low intensity conflicts has not had a long history, but its development has now begun to reach formal acceptance within the Air Force. While many individuals both inside and outside the military may see it as little more than academic, doctrine, particularly LIC doctrine, is the foundation for successful employment of military force in conflicts short of war. The Department of Defense defines doctrine as “fundamental principles which military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application.”¹³ Low intensity conflict resolution depends on the understanding of doctrine by military and political leadership. From its beginnings in the early 1980’s, a continuing effort to define LIC doctrine received attention from just two

¹¹FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, Washington, DC: HQ Departments of the Army and the Air Force, December 5, 1990, 5-1. FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 lists these nine peacetime contingency operations (PCO) but states that PCOs are not limited to these: shows of force and demonstrations; non-combatant evacuation operations; rescue and recovery operations; strikes and raids; peacemaking; unconventional warfare; disaster relief; security assistance surges; support to US civil authorities.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Official Dictionary of Military Terms, Second Edition*, Irvine, CA: Global Professional Publications, 1992, 118.

of the services. Despite the current turmoil of budget reductions in the military, the evolving world situation has supported the US military's steady effort to formalize LIC doctrine.

Within the last four years, all services have been reexamining their roles and missions in light of the dramatic draw down in US defense spending. These funding cuts have required new thinking on how to fight our nation's battles. For the Air Force's part, new doctrine for aerospace power has supported the traditional view that air power can be applied with equal effectiveness at all points on the conflict spectrum. AFM 1-1 notes that "traditionally, organizing, equipping, and training of US military forces have focused, almost exclusively, on preparing for war with operations short of war being viewed as a lesser included case."¹⁴ Even though the current focus is on restructuring the military to face future conventional conflicts, USAF leadership seems committed to addressing LIC doctrine for the long term. The USAF chief of staff has directed that any doctrine the service embraces that is not specific in content to the service will be included in joint doctrine. As a result, the LIC doctrine used by the Army in FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 will be accepted by the Air Force as a part of the accepted version of Joint Publication 3-07, *Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*.¹⁵

LIC doctrine today in the joint world is for the most part derived from past experiences such as Vietnam, the failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran (Operation Eagle Claw), and Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury). The first serious effort to characterize the difficulty of confronting LIC was the Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project sponsored by the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command in the summer of 1986. This truly joint project's findings set the stage for the development of current Air Force LIC doctrine.

¹⁴AFM 1-1, Vol. II, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, Washington, DC, March 1992, 57.

¹⁵Interview conducted by the author with Major Andy Weaver, HQ USAF/XOXD, May 27, 1994. Major Weaver is responsible for coordination of the Air Staff position on all USAF doctrine related to low intensity conflict between the Air Staff, the Joint Staff, and the Joint Doctrine Center.

The 1986 Joint Low Intensity Conflict Project identified several “key truths” about LIC:

- ♦ No new and simple fixes exist to the old and complex problem of low-intensity conflict.
- ♦ A comprehensive approach is required rather than piecemeal fixes.
- ♦ A premium is placed on civil-military cooperation at every echelon.
- ♦ The procedures, organizations, and equipment designed for mid- or high-intensity conflict are not necessarily suitable to low-intensity conflict.
- ♦ The host nation must be primarily responsible for action in counterinsurgency.¹⁶

These “key truths” formed the core concepts behind how the military views LIC, and became the basis of LIC doctrine until 1990. From this report, FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 was developed and fielded. At the same time, the services were developing a joint doctrine for use in these operations, Joint Publication 3-07. This document is nearing final approval after almost four years of “test pub” status. The joint doctrine is very much in line with FM 100-20/AFP 3-20.¹⁷ The importance of having common terminology and approach to these operations cannot be overemphasized. Whether the mission today involves peacekeeping, countering terrorism or dealing with insurgency, USAF units need a common reference, which includes clear discussion of LIC concepts, strategy and employment options, so that every unit can understand their role.

¹⁶United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project, Final Report, Volume I, Analytical Review of Low-Intensity Conflict*, Ft Monroe, VA: HQ USA TRADOC, 1 August 1986, 16-2.

¹⁷Interview with Major Andrew Weaver, HQ USAF/XOXD, May 27, 1994.

USAF View of Low Intensity Conflict

The need for effective LIC operations has dramatically increased in the post-Cold War world. US military units have been involved in all facets of LIC from peacekeeping in Somalia to air policing over Iraq. Today, more than 30 regional conflicts are continuing worldwide. Any one of these conflicts could potentially involve US forces either directly or in support of alliances and coalitions. The requirement for trained, equipped and ready forces to commit to any part of the globe has never been more important. Today's unstable world is a stark contrast to the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War era. The question of what type of conflict one must be prepared to confront directly affects all aspects of effective military organization. For military planners and "war fighters," understanding LIC is equally important and difficult. LIC is important because of its very complex nature, as well as its place as the worldwide conflict growth industry of the '90s. For most US military strategists, LIC is difficult because it requires a more complex set of knowledge, tools and methods than traditional conventional warfare. The dual nature of LIC is exemplified by the experience of Vietnam, which began as an insurgency. According to Jerome W. Klingaman, author of the USAF Foreign Internal Defense doctrine (AFM 2-11), the conversion of Vietnam from a counterinsurgency problem to a large conventional war still marks most senior leaders thinking about LIC. Now called Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), the LIC doctrine of the Vietnam era has evolved beyond the basic counterinsurgency, superpower balance of power options of the past. This evolution was still in progress during the 1980's when these conflicts were still called LIC.¹⁸ Therefore, as the case studies I will examine are from the 1980's, I will continue to refer to low intensity

¹⁸For the purposes of clarity, LIC will be used throughout the paper since the case studies are all from the period when LIC was the standard term for conflicts other than war. MOOTW when specifically referencing works that incorporate its use.

conflict as LIC throughout this paper. Today, both policy makers and military leaders must carefully examine low intensity conflicts so that the nature of the conflict is fully understood, thereby preventing the commitment of military forces to a potential quagmire.

Since the end of the Second World War, US political and military leaders have continually sought to understand how to deal with conflict short of war. The US military has evolved a limited amount of LIC doctrine. The current military focus on joint operations has provided various service regulations and studies detailing the aspects of LIC, however, these documents are not given the same priority as the traditional applications of service missions, such as armor warfare, sea control and air superiority. This attitude is reflected in the lack of an accepted joint doctrine for LIC. To date, only draft joint publications, or test publications, have been developed to discuss LIC, and these are seen by their developers as lacking completeness. Lieutenant Colonel Klingaman, USAF (Ret.), believes USAF acceptance of LIC as a part of service doctrine has been slowed by the lingering memory of our counterinsurgency efforts in Vietnam.¹⁹

From the US Air Force perspective, the Basic Aerospace Doctrine (AFM 1-1) provides the basis for air power employment of the USAF. Within AFM 1-1, LIC is discussed in terms of its nature and place in the overall concept of war and the American military experience. Without specifically addressing the missions that support LIC, AFM 1-1 provides an integration of the concept of “a significant domain of military activities (that) exists below the level of war.”²⁰ The doctrine manual delineates these activities as foreign internal defense (FID), peacekeeping, insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, and combating terrorism. Volume II of AFM 1-1 devotes an entire essay to the topic. These

¹⁹Interview conducted by the author on May 10, 1994 with Jerome W. Klingaman, AF Center for Low Intensity Conflict, Hurlburt AFB, FL.

²⁰AFM 1-1, 3.

volumes give a general sense of what is LIC, yet there is no direct link to actual employment of air power to support LIC activities.

Joint and US Army LIC doctrine is mentioned in “Military Activities Short of War,” an expanded essay found in AFM 1-1 Volume II. Volume II also refers to two doctrine publications, JCS Joint Test Pub 3-07 and US Army Field Manual FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* (5 December 1990). The designation of FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 as an Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) is interesting since the “pamphlet” designation does not allow the document to be referred to as official service doctrine. The US Army manual represents the first major revision of their LIC doctrine since 1981. For the USAF, AFP 3-20 begins to characterize the services’ understanding of LIC as an important issue. Just one month before the current AFM 1-1 was published, a separate manual, AFM 2-11, *Foreign Internal Defense Operations* was approved. AFM 2-11 “articulates fundamental Air Force roles for FID and advises commanders how to employ and integrate Air Force Resources to achieve FID objectives.”²¹ This “2-series” manual serves as operational doctrine, establishing the concept of Air Force support of other services and nations involved in LIC. The current level of service commitment to FID is a total of 28 FID personnel who are deployed to Latin America.²²

The development of USAF LIC doctrine began to progress by the mid-1980’s, as Air Force thinkers began to encourage enlightened discussion. When Lt. Col. David J. Dean wrote his view on the subject in October 1986, he outlined the requirement for an

²¹AFM 2-11, *Aerospace Operational Doctrine, Foreign Internal Defense Operations*. Washington, DC: HQ US Air Force, 1 January 1992, i.

²²Air Force Special Operations Command, *Mission Area Plan: Aviation Foreign Internal Defense*, 1 December 1993, 26. This white paper written to support the USAF Modernization Plan discusses FID in context with recent DOD and HQ USAF directives relating to future strategy and doctrine. Chapter 3 provides the USAF plan for FID from the present FY94 to FY99 when Aviation FID is declared to have an Initial Operational Capability in US Southern Command only. This FID cadre of 108 military and DOD civilians will operate the entire Aviation FID program for the region. Other regions will be organized on an as needed basis. See Chapter 5 of this paper for further discussion.

increased emphasis on LIC. In his book *The Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict*, Lt. Col. Dean suggests that the Army's 1981 view of LIC was too narrow to include all aspects of LIC.²³ Congress, as a part of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, directed the DOD to provide an appropriate force structure for simultaneously addressing conventional conflict and conflicts short of war. As a result of this legislation, the joint US Special Operations Command (USSOC) was created.²⁴

The one key indicator of USSOC's power is fiscal. The level of procurement funding for USSOC reached its peak in FY92, but has been reduced to less than half of that level today.²⁵ When contrasted with the overall DOD and USAF procurement budgets for the same period, an interesting trend emerges. During this period, overall DOD procurement was reduced 30% and the USAF aircraft procurement budget lost a similar 32%.²⁶ While these big picture numbers may not tell the whole story, it is clear that since the draw down hit the DOD, USAF special operations were not spared from reduction. Fortunately, a great deal of the necessary equipment for modernizing AFSOC units had been procured by FY92.

Special operations forces have been critical to nearly all previous LIC operations and have been essential to wartime operations as well. Hopefully, these budget trends do not reflect a long term decision by the DOD to sacrifice special operations for conventional capability. Even a robust conventional capable military force has to rely on

²³Dean, Lt. Col. David J. *The Air Force Role In Low-Intensity Conflict*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, October 1986, 4.

²⁴Op cit., 1. For example, Foreign Internal Defense (FID) is one of the principle mission areas of USSOCOM as specified by law (Title 10, US Code).

²⁵For actual figures of each budget see US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY92, 391-393. US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY93, 501. US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY94, 91. The author calculated USSOC procurement decrease by comparing the total dollars of each subsequent FY amount to that of FY92.

²⁶For actual figures of each budget see US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY92, for DOD, 315, for USAF, 376. US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY93, for DOD, 476; for USAF, 533. US House of Representatives, Defense Appropriations Bill, FY94, for DOD, 4; for USAF, 71. The author calculated USAF and DOD procurement decrease by comparing the total dollars of each subsequent FY amount to that of FY92.

unconventional forces and methods to be able to effectively respond to the varied challenges of conflicts short of war.²⁷ The USAF contribution to these operations is no less reliant on special forces now than in the past. A well integrated conventional and unconventional operational force is essential to success in LIC. To be able to properly evaluate the effectiveness of USAF support of LIC operations, a brief overview of LIC is necessary.

USAF Support of LIC Operations

For the past four decades, USAF units have played a part in all of the LIC categories, and they will continue to be called upon in the future. Examples of recent USAF operations in support of operations short of war include the continuing airlift of aid and enforcement of the no-fly zone in the former Yugoslavia, support of UN relief operations in Somalia, and coordination with other agencies to monitor and interdict drug shipments into the US. Despite the large commitment of USAF assets to prepare for large-scale conventional conflicts, the most frequent use of US forces in the past two decades has been in operations short of war. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the Cold War focus on Europe shifting to other regions, USAF operations will continue to be committed to LIC applications.

Within the US Air Force, LIC operations have been supported by virtually all commands. Air Combat Command and its predecessor, Tactical Air Command, have provided conventional and special forces in the LIC environment. Air Mobility Command has provided airlift in support of all facets of LIC. In an effort to improve the basic skills of indigenous military forces to operate in war and in conflicts short of war,

²⁷AFSOC White Paper, *The Role of SOF in the Air Campaign*, December 1993, 1.

Air Education and Training Command has provided one of the largest training programs to foreign personnel in the world .

Other commands have assisted the US government's effort to supply civilian and military aid to developing nations in support of Foreign Internal Defense operations and Security Assistance. From pilot training to communications, aircraft maintenance and joint exercises, the USAF has been a key player in US assistance to many other nation's efforts to deal with LIC. The only major problem which has surfaced is America's tendency to "run the program" for the nation being supported. This tendency has been recognized, and, as a result, current FID programs are now very limited in scope with the emphasis on host nation leadership.²⁸

One key element of the USAF contribution in support of LIC operations is the USAF Special Operations Forces. Special Operations units have been applied to both conventional conflicts and conflict short of war. After several tragic applications of special forces, the US Special Operations Command (USSOC) was formed and given its own budget within DOD to address the need for organizing, training and equipping all the required special forces for the nation. Within this command the USAF component, USAF Special Operations Command (AFSOC), provides the specialized airlift, combat support, command and control required for Air Force and joint special operations. The main focus of AFSOC and USSOC is to train to support war operations with unconventional operations; however, these same capabilities have direct application to LIC. While these special operators are not the exclusive LIC force in the USAF, AFSOC represents the clearest commitment to LIC support within the USAF force structure.

To appreciate fully how well the US Air Force is prepared to meet the challenges of LIC in the future, we need to consider the operational experiences of the recent past. We have defined LIC as confrontation between nations or states below the level of war,

²⁸Air Force Special Operations Command, *Mission Area Plan: Aviation Foreign Internal Defense*, 1 December 1993, 24.

but above the level of normal peaceful competition, and discussed the military's role in resolving these conflicts. Having discussed the evolution of doctrine to support the military in LIC operations and briefly reviewed the USAF's doctrine and view of LIC, we can begin to examine the recent historical evolution of USAF support of LIC resolution. After considering the case studies, I will provide a concluding chapter that will compare the lessons from the case studies to my view of the future environment USAF operations will face.

2. Case Study: Operation Urgent Fury

Operation Urgent Fury highlights the difficulties to be found when dealing with a rapidly developing crisis. Low intensity conflicts are frequently punctuated by crises requiring immediate action by national leadership. In late October 1983, President Reagan answered a request for assistance from the only remaining legitimate political entity on the Caribbean island of Grenada. In cooperation with neighboring island nations, the United States launched Operation Urgent Fury to rescue American lives and restore democracy on the island.²⁹ As an integral part of the military response to this conflict, the US Air Force supported the US-led effort with both lethal and non-lethal airpower.

This case study will examine the USAF contribution to resolution of this low intensity conflict. After a discussion of the background of the conflict in Grenada which lead to President Reagan's decision to intervene, I will describe the application of USAF airpower to support the intervention. These operations, and the intervention itself, provided important lessons for military and political leaders for dealing with low intensity conflict. Following a review of these lessons, I will discuss their impact on future USAF support to LIC operations.

Some students of military conflict may find it difficult to classify an armed intervention as low intensity conflict. Peacetime contingency operations are an important part of low intensity conflict when viewed in terms of their geographical size and political scope as well as their short duration. There is certainly no debate regarding the intense level of fighting involved in Operation Urgent Fury. However, low intensity conflicts, by definition, "are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain

²⁹US House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the Full Committee, *Lessons Learned as a Result of US Military Operations in Grenada*, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, January 1984, 26.

regional and global security considerations.”³⁰ While most low intensity conflicts are protracted, peacetime contingency operations are

politically sensitive military activities normally characterized by short-term, rapid projection or employment of forces in *conditions short of war*. [emphasis added] They are often undertaken in crisis avoidance or crisis management situations requiring the use of military instruments to enforce or support diplomatic initiatives. Peacetime contingency operations are not limited to--shows of force and demonstrations, noncombatant evacuation operations, rescue and recovery operations, strikes and raids, peacemaking, unconventional warfare, disaster relief, security assistance surges, support to US civil authorities.³¹

Today, we have service doctrine such as US Army field manual and USAF pamphlet FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, to delineate between war and other conflicts. To the individual combatant on the ground such distinctions may seem arbitrary; however, understanding the nature and type of a conflict is critical to the decision process for the conflict’s resolution. At the time of Operation Urgent Fury, a coherent doctrine for dealing with operations short of war did not exist.

Urgent Fury has been examined from many perspectives by military staffs, legislative committees, and civilian experts. Significant changes to US military organizational structures, joint doctrine, and operational emphasis have been directed as a result of legislation enacted to correct joint warfare problems that existed at the time. Despite the great deal of discussion and analysis of the political and military aspects of Operation Urgent Fury, very little has been written about the USAF contribution to the operation. This case study will attempt to shed some light on the importance of air operations in support of a peacetime contingency operation such as an armed intervention. Featured in the case study will be USAF support functions that were pivotal to the success of Operation Urgent Fury.

³⁰Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The Official Dictionary of Military Terms, Second Edition*, Irvine, CA: Global Professional Publications, 1992, 212.

³¹FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, 5-1

Background

From its early colonial days, the island of Grenada has been gripped by some form of rebellion met by authoritarian rule. The most recent episode occurred in 1979 when Maurice Bishop rose to power in a coup. As prime minister, Bishop continued the excesses of his predecessor by spending great sums on personal projects and extravagance. The Grenadian people quietly accepted his regime because they had been “governed” under similar circumstances for many decades.³² Within the first year of Bishop’s rule, Grenada adopted a communist model of government, and courted Soviet and communist nations’ financial assistance. Regional governments and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) were philosophically opposed to this form of government, but, at the time, decided to isolate Grenada, instead of attempting a military solution.

In May 1983, President Reagan denounced the construction of a 10,000’ runway at Point Salines, Grenada, funded by Cuba and the Soviet Union. The president’s concern over this development was for the hemispheric implications of another “communist aircraft carrier” in the Caribbean.³³ Grenada failed to capture the US national interest for long, as other events, particularly in the Middle East, captured the US administration’s attention. However, the OECS began to hear growing concerns over reports of “an arms buildup in Grenada far in excess of anything that would be required for the Grenadian Government to keep Grenadians within (its control).”³⁴ Since Point Salines runway extension was still under construction, the full threat potential to the

³²US Senate, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Senate Hearing 98-757, CRI reference # S181-33, Washington: US. Government Printing Office, 1984, 30. This hearing provided testimony by the OECS Chairman and Prime Minister of Dominica, Eugenia Charles.

³³History, 21st Air Force, 1 January 1982-31 December 1984, 142.

³⁴Op cit., 31.

region had yet to be realized.³⁵ Luckily, sufficient construction had been completed to allow its use during Operation Urgent Fury.

At every opportunity during 1983 Grenada's deputy prime minister, Bernard Coard, attempted to turn the Central Committee away from Bishop. This internal rivalry eventually resulted in Coard's order to arrest Bishop on October 13th. For a few days after Bishop's arrest, Coard maintained control of the island. He had the backing of the island's Central Committee, and initially controlled Grenada's Peoples' Revolutionary Army. The people of Grenada were not fully aware of Coard's actions for several days.³⁶

Since his rise to power, the population of Grenada had passively accepted Maurice Bishop's record of tyrannical rule. When the islanders became aware of Coard's coup, they saw it as unjustified and began to organize against him. By October 19th, news of the growing crisis on Grenada reached neighboring island nations.³⁷ As these islands began to consider their options, a crowd of thousands of Bishop's supporters marched to the prime minister's residence where Coard had detained him. Seeing the crowd and desiring to avoid bloodshed, Coard released Bishop. The crowd swept the prime minister away to his military command post.³⁸

Bernard Coard still desired to rule Grenada. With the agreement of the Central Committee, Coard ordered an armed assault on Bishop's stronghold. In a brief but bloody confrontation, Coard and the army succeeded in recapturing Bishop. With the agreement of the Central Committee, Coard summarily executed Bishop and seven of his followers. Bishop's death was "justified" on Grenada radio that evening, and martial law was

³⁵Mark Adkin, Major, *Urgent Fury, The Battle for Grenada* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 6, 12-14, 22-24.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 42.

³⁷US. Senate, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Senate Hearing 98-757, CRI reference # S181-33, Washington: US. Government Printing Office, 1984, 31.

³⁸Adkin, 47-85.

declared. The details of the events were not clear until several days later when members of the Revolutionary Military Council, the rulers of Grenada after Bishop's death, were captured during Urgent Fury.³⁹

Few details of the internal conflict on the island initially reached the outside world except the fact that Bishop was dead and chaos reigned. Several nations, including the United States, expressed deep concern for the safety of their citizens. Due to the rapid loss of order on Grenada, actual numbers and locations of these citizens were difficult for outside sources to determine.⁴⁰ Few contacts on the island were available to assess the situation accurately.⁴¹ As the situation deteriorated, the OECS and other nations sought the assistance of the US to intervene.

With the consent and assistance of neighboring Caribbean nations, the United States undertook the largest airborne and air landed assault since Vietnam. The president stated the objectives to the nation and passed them through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the theater commander, the US Commander-In-Chief, Atlantic (CINCLANT). The JCS Execute Order directed CINCLANT to "conduct military operations to protect and evacuate US and designated foreign nationals from Grenada, neutralize Grenadian forces, stabilize the internal situation, and maintain the peace." In most cases, US military units had less than 24 hours notice to plan, deploy and fight. Ad hoc planning ruled the day between the first JCS notification and the completion of the mission on November 2nd. The CINCLANT's operations plan called for deployment of USAF F-15s and E-

³⁹Ibid., 47-85.

⁴⁰Op cit., 30. Chairman Charles stated before the Subcommittee that the OECS nations had no intelligence network to give them advanced warning or a clear idea of what was happening except from anecdotal evidence but by October 21 meeting in Barbados, the OECS unanimously called for intervention. As far as OECS was concerned, no government existed on Grenada after Bishop's death. Only the Governor General, Sir Paul Schoon, the UK Commonwealth representative on the island, was seen as a legitimate head of state. Governor General Schoon had called for help through diplomatic channels and this request was sufficient for the OECS to decide.

⁴¹Ibid., 131. Barbados Defense Force had good intel on Grenada, passed to US defense attaché at Bridgetown who passed it on, Adkin believes information did not influence planning.

3A AWACS to Puerto Rico to act as a blocking force between Cuba and Grenada.⁴² A naval task force, already underway for the Mediterranean to support Beirut, was diverted to Grenada to provide air support and conduct a Marine amphibious assault. The newly created Joint Special Operations Center at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina directed the initial assault on Point Salines airfield, which included armed reconnaissance provided by AC-130H gunships, and an airdrop of USAF Combat Control Teams and Army Rangers. The main body for the invasion consisted of air-landed Army paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne who were flown to the airport at Point Salines on the southern tip of the island.⁴³ The Marines were ordered to assault the northern part of the island.⁴⁴ Once established, each force was to secure the island and evacuate any American civilians and other nationals as required, and attempt to restore order.

From its inception, Operation Urgent Fury was hampered by strict security, poor communications and poor coordination of joint operations. As strict operational security (OPSEC) was in place from the beginning of the crisis, the flow of critical information between the various units, commands, and services units involved was limited.⁴⁵ Critical information, such as enemy strength and location, friendly units involved, timing of various unit actions, and specific tactical objectives were unavailable to tactical commanders. Available communications were not capable of connecting all the forces together due to a lack of a common communications plan and insufficient joint communication capabilities. The rapid timetable of the operation forced commanders at all levels to react to the situation at hand with the forces they controlled, leaving joint

⁴²USCINCLANT, *Operation Urgent Fury Report*, Unclassified Version, 2.

⁴³History, Military Airlift Command, *Operation Urgent Fury*, January 88, Volume I, 31.

⁴⁴Op cit.

⁴⁵Adkin, 134.

coordination for the post war debrief. Despite these problems, the operation accomplished all of the president's objectives in little more than a week.⁴⁶

The command arrangements for Operation Urgent Fury reflected the haste in which the operation was conceived. An operations plan for a Grenada invasion, OPLAN 2360, existed but was not implemented. As directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Commander in Chief, Atlantic Command, Admiral Wesley McDonald, initially unaware of the existence of OPLAN 2360, directed his staff to plan for the invasion.⁴⁷ The initial joint planning conference proceeded with many key players arriving late or missing the meeting altogether. Brigadier General Patterson, who was to be the commander of the airlift forces, was one who missed the conference.⁴⁸ The organization which resulted from the initial joint planning conference was designated JTF 120, and would be commanded by Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III. JTF 120 consisted of four task forces supported by the Caribbean Peacekeeping Force and the USS *Independence* Battle Group (CTG 20.5). The organization structure of JTF can be seen in figure 1.

⁴⁶William S. Lind, *Report to the Congressional Military Reform Caucus, Subject: The Grenada Operation*, 5 April 1984. In this highly controversial report to Congress, Mr. Lind, of the Military Reform Institute, a former staffer for then Senator Gary Hart, submitted a four page critique of military operations in Urgent Fury. He charged that the desire for each of the services to get a "piece of the pie" resulted in improper planning, execution and likely assisted the enemy resistance. Of note, he took no shots at USAF operations. He also stated that the performance of elite units such as Delta Force, SEALs, Rangers, etc. did not justify the money spent or their claims of eliteness. AU Library Document M-43828-U.

⁴⁷Major Stephen W. Senkovich, *From Port Salines to Panama City: The Evolution of Command and Control in Contingency Operations*, May 8, 1990, 11.

⁴⁸Adkin, 132.

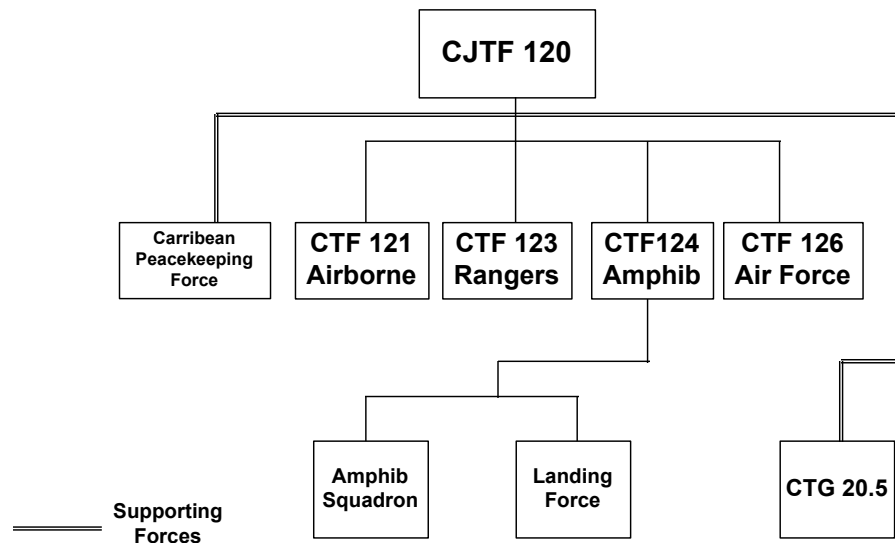


Figure 1 Task Organization for Joint Task Force 120.
(From James G. March and Roger Weissinger-Baylon, *Ambiguity of Command: Organizational Perspectives on Military Decision Making*, 280.)

While it seemed that these forces were responsible to the Commander, JTF 120 (CJTF 120), most of these task forces operated with little direction from Vice Admiral Metcalf. In a discussion of his role in Operation Urgent Fury, the admiral stated that his most immediate concern was keeping the higher headquarters informed, and letting his field commanders carry out their missions. He believed that his “command philosophy was to direct ‘what,’ not ‘how,’ to my subordinate commanders.”⁴⁹ His command ship communications capabilities were inadequate to the task of coordinating two separate invasions of the island, surface operations in the waters surrounding Grenada, and the air support for both.⁵⁰

⁴⁹James G. March and Roger Weissinger-Baylon, *Ambiguity of Command: Organizational Perspectives on Military Decision Making*, 284.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 295.

With the exception of the special operations forces provided to Operation Urgent Fury, the Air Force units operated according to their on-scene service leadership. The air defense forces that provided a covering force between Cuba and Grenada were led by a USAF brigadier general acting as an airborne command element from HQ TAC aboard the AWACS. He had no direct contact with Brigadier General Patterson, who was acting as the commander of TF126, until they met face-to-face at Point Salines, four days after the start of the invasion. Both generals agreed that they would have preferred a single air commander for the operation; however, each felt that their separation did not hamper operations.⁵¹

A great deal of study of the difficulties and accomplishments of military units in Operation Urgent Fury has been done. Legislation in the form of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 was enacted to address the need to improve joint operations. Air operations in Operation Urgent Fury, however, have not been analyzed in as much depth as surface operations.

⁵¹History, 21st Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1984, Supplementary Document 3-64, 194.

USAF Operations in Urgent Fury

Operation Urgent Fury's airpower was critical to the success of the operation but was operated according to the functional command structure that existed in 1983. No single individual was responsible for airpower in this conflict. USAF airpower was provided by the Tactical Air Command (TAC) and the Military Airlift Command (MAC) with each organization's units reporting to separate air commanders. Naval air operations were commanded by the Joint Task Force operating under CINCLANT's control. Army aviation operated in conjunction with the on-scene ground commander as a division level asset. Despite the stovepipe command arrangement of airpower, USAF air operations successfully carried out airlift, combat support, and air defense missions.

"It came so quickly; there was virtually no planning—it was all a push system," stated Brigadier General Robert B. Patterson, Vice Commander of Military Airlift Command's 21st Air Force and the commander of airlift forces (COMALF) during Operation Urgent Fury.⁵² The entire operation from warning order to mission complete was accomplished in 14 days. During these two weeks, TAC units provided airborne early warning, battlefield airspace command and control including on-demand close air support, and air defense. Strategic and tactical airlift operations, special operations, air traffic control and aeromedical evacuation were accomplished by MAC units. USAF airlift accounted for more than 15,000 tons of cargo and 35,000 passengers in nearly 1000 missions.⁵³ Various commands contributed support through logistics, intelligence, communications and airbase security.

⁵²History, 21st Air Force, Volume IX, Supplementary Document 3-17, Interview between E.D. Canivan and Brigadier General Robert B. Patterson, 29-30 December 83, 2.

⁵³Op cit., 110, 114.

The first USAF contribution to the rescue operation was the initial airdrop from 500 feet of US Army rangers from MAC special operations MC-130 and C-130E aircraft. The altitude was significantly lower than planned due to a combination of heavier than expected resistance at the airfield and the small size of the drop zone. After an equipment failure on the lead aircraft caused a change in drop order, the Ranger command element, including a detachment of USAF personnel acting as a Forward Air Control unit, was first on the ground.⁵⁴ Their mission was to call-in enemy anti-aircraft fire suppression from orbiting AC-130 gunships. As the Rangers sought to control the airfield, the FAC continued to coordinate “near-surgical” fire support from the gunships, while maintaining face-to-face contact with the Army ground commander.⁵⁵ Within eight hours of initiation of action, the special forces had secured the airfield for the successful follow-on air landing of the 82nd Airborne troops.⁵⁶ Together, the special forces ground units pre-briefed their operations prior to departure from the Joint Special Operations Center at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.⁵⁷ The success securing of the airfield by special operations was the result of joint training, prior coordination of tactical operations, and adequate intelligence of the airfield.

Military Airlift Command became the lead command for the USAF “because of its force projection capability with transports and the non-strategic environment in which

⁵⁴Interview with Colonel James Roper, Air War College Faculty, Maxwell AFB, AL, May 11, 1994. Then Major Roper, a USAF fighter pilot, with extensive LIC experience in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam early in his career, was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 75th Infantry, as a forward air controller. Within one minute of landing on the runway at Point Salines, he was directing AC-130 fire on preselected targets around the airfield as Ranger units sought to establish control of the field.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶See Jack L. Hamilton, *Operation Urgent Fury: A Battalion Commander's Perspective*, Washington, DC: National War College, March, 1985, 13-14. Colonel Hamilton expresses displeasure with how he received word his unit would be airlanded instead of airdropped. His contention is that airdrop would be a more expedient means to input his troops. The Desert Shield experience of taking the 82nd by bus to the front seems to speak to this issue of speed versus safety.

⁵⁷Op cit.

Urgent Fury was conducted.”⁵⁸ To get the people and equipment to the battle, MAC needed a staging area for the C-130s which would provide the initial airdrop, air landed assault, and resupply/reinforcement flights needed after the airfield was initially secured. Barbados offered a suitable field that would act as the link between Grenada and the outside world. The basic airlift plan called for C-5As and C-141s to bring personnel and equipment to Barbados. Once in Barbados, equipment such as Army helicopters could be assembled for direct use. Personnel and supplies needed in the opening hours of the battle were loaded in C-130s for the 30 minute flight to Grenada.⁵⁹ Once established, the airlift was the sole means of logistical support to the southern half of the island for the duration of the conflict.

The overall airlift operation for Urgent Fury was one of the largest of its kind to date. MAC’s 21st Air Force accounted for some 171 missions in one day during the operation.⁶⁰ The effort was so intense that air traffic control was a “nightmare.” Initially, a single three-man Combat Control Team (CCT) from the 317th Tactical Airlift Wing had to work 48 straight hours to keep the Point Salines airfield operational for the non-stop movement of aircraft into the island. On scene commanders saw the difficulty of coordinating such a massive airlift, since “normal command and control couldn’t keep up with the flow [of airlift movements] because we were operating from so many locations and everyone [was] going to the same spot.”⁶¹ Insufficient communications proved to be airpower’s most difficult problem.

Communications is often a key element of battle outcome. Urgent Fury was no exception. With air forces from four services attempting to use an airspace no larger than

⁵⁸History, Military Airlift Command, *Urgent Fury*, January 1988, Volume I, 76.

⁵⁹History, 21st Air Force, Volume IX, Supplementary Document 3-17, 4.

⁶⁰History, 21st Air Force, 1 January 1982-31 December 1984, 184.

⁶¹Interview between E.D. Canivan, 21st Air Force Historian and Colonel David S. Hinton, 21st AF Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, 6 April 1984.

20 square miles, air space control was critical. Because communications were not jointly coordinated prior to the operation, each service had a different setup. When the 317th TAW's CCT began operations at Point Salines, they only had the frequencies and call signs for the special operations forces. When regular Army, Navy and Marine aircraft arrived, the CCT was unable to contact them. Without direct contact, the team was unable to insure the field's airspace as safe for operations. Enemy fire around an airfield certainly increases the challenge of providing safe and efficient air traffic control for a CCT; however, unannounced helicopters popping up over a ridge to land on an active runway represent more than just a coordination problem. In addition to different operational procedures among the services, several near misses occurred as a result of the poor communications. The control team needed face-to-face contact with the pilots on the ground to insure the aircrews received the proper communications plan.⁶²

Communications problems were not limited to the tactical level. Inadequate communications between the theater CINC and his subordinate commanders required face-to-face meetings, including one at the Point Salines airfield during the battle between COMALF and the TAC force commander.⁶³ Satellite communication was in use, but severely limited in both equipment fielded and channels available. MAC forces had only two channels, including one for voice, which was used as a "party line" for all players from CINCMAC to the deployed airlift coordination element (ALCE) at Barbados. This secure satellite channel was frequently saturated, which often resulted in satellite shutdown for as long as 30 minutes.⁶⁴

Along with communications, fuel is another vital aspect to successful air operations. By staging out of neighboring Barbados, MAC was able to use a secure,

⁶²Op cit., 185.

⁶³History, 21st Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1984, Supplementary Document 3-64, 194.

⁶⁴History, 21st Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1984, Supplementary Document 3-133, 222.

existing source of fuel from the storage tanks at Brantley International Airport.⁶⁵ With 20 to 30 C-130Es and 10 to 12 C-141Bs flying multiple sorties each day at the height of operations, fuel management became critical. The flexibility of the support element at Barbados was put to the test when the main pump for the fuel tanks failed. The auxiliary pumps were not fast enough to provide the necessary reserves to keep the operation going beyond 24 hours after the failure of the main pump. The main pump's blueprints were flown via contract airlift to California. A hand-crafted replacement part was returned in time to keep the air bridge resupplied.⁶⁶ In just two weeks, 7.886 million pounds of fuel was contracted from Shell Oil on Barbados.⁶⁷

In addition to airlift, close air support (CAS) was provided through the effective use of two specialized types of C-130s. Tactical Air Command's EC-130E Airborne Command Control and Communications (ABCCC) coordinated requests while MAC's AC-130H "Spectre" gunship aircraft provided close air support. As ground units and arriving airlift ran into resistance from enemy fire, ABCCC coordinated their requests, then directed the "Spectre" to deliver fire support and suppression attacks with its weapons. This combination was widely praised as one of the most important combat capabilities of the operation.⁶⁸ The gunship used its destructive power of delayed fuse rounds fired from its 105mm gun to destroy concrete bunkers. In addition, the gunships provided unique support such as combat search and rescue coordination and on-scene reconnaissance.⁶⁹

⁶⁵History, 21st Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1984, Volume I, 196.

⁶⁶Ibid. 196. The hero (and the lesson learned) from this story was an able sergeant who had contracts and procurement authority. His commander stated that nobody can conduct contingency operations without the ability to get and spend Uncle Sam's money.

⁶⁷History, Military Airlift Command, *Urgent Fury*, January 1988, 114.

⁶⁸History, 1st Special Operations Wing, 1 January 1989-31 December 1989, I-33.

⁶⁹History, 23rd Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1983, Volume I, 94. After an attack helicopter was shot down, the on-scene AC-130H vectored rescue helicopters to the crash site.

These air operations were not flawless. Another view of the air/land interface can be seen from the airborne troops' perspective. One battalion commander experienced first hand the problem of coordinating joint operations in a crisis.

“When we arrived at the airfield, the 12 C-141s were lined up, locked, with no crews in sight with whom to coordinate. As it turned out, the crews were receiving a briefing at that time on the operation. Under normal procedures, I would have been at the briefing to brief the ground tactical plan and to coordinate the airborne assault operation. Instead, my only interface with the airlift commander was a short introduction prior to take-off. After a frustrating 35 minutes spent trying to get the aircraft unlocked, we entered them to find that they were not rigged for a parachute assault. LANTCOM had issued the Air Force unit a mission for an air land operation. We missed take-off time by one hour because of the resulting delay.”⁷⁰

Strict security and lack of time forced the operators in the field to solve the problem on the fly. The eventual air landing meant that battalion commander and his headquarters landed before his battalion, which, by his recollection, was a first in the history of airborne operations. However, from the perspective of the forces already in place, air landing was the best method to build up forces in the face of a rapidly diminishing threat.⁷¹

LIC Lessons Learned from Operation Urgent Fury

Over just four days, Operation Urgent Fury went from a standing start to the largest military operation since the close of the Vietnam war, and helped expand the idea of low intensity conflict beyond the traditional concepts of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Certainly the combatants in theater did not see the conflict as “low

⁷⁰Jack L. Hamilton, Operation Urgent Fury: A Battalion Commander's Perspective, Washington, DC: National War College, March, 1985, 13-14.

⁷¹Interview with Colonel James Roper.

intensity.” But the experience gained in Grenada provided a great deal of motivation for the US military to adopt a more realistic approach to LIC.

Successful joint operations, both in war and in low intensity conflict, can be achieved. The five LIC imperatives listed in FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, provide the best measure of merit for how well Operation Urgent Fury addressed this conflict. Since FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 is the only USAF document which provides a discussion of LIC considerations such as these, all USAF operations in support of LIC should consider them. These imperatives include political dominance, unity of effort, adaptability, legitimacy, and perseverance.⁷² Operation Urgent Fury has been termed a success even though all of these imperatives were not observed.

President Reagan clearly understood the importance of the “political objectives that drive military decisions” (political dominance), and the impact that these objectives have on military operations. His objectives left little doubt about what needed to be done.

Unity of effort, or the need for all the players to be integrated in a common effort, was not fully realized. Indications of a lack of unity appeared at all levels. At the theater level, the lack of a predetermined operations plan or integrated communications setup prevented smooth coordination of such things as timing of the initial assault and the air operations chain of command.⁷³ At the battlefield level, airfield management and intelligence flow were impossible to coordinate effectively.⁷⁴ The one constant that all

⁷²FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, HQ Departments of the Army and the Air Force, 5 December 1990, 1-5-1-6.

⁷³Adkin, 175. History, 21st Air Force, Volume IX, Supplementary Document 3-17, Interview between E.D. Canivan and Brigadier General Robert B. Patterson, 29-30 December 83, 2. General Patterson confirmed the first time he and his TACAIR counterpart, Brigadier General Meyer, coordinated their division of authority on assets such as AC-130H was face-to-face on the ground at Grenada on October 28th.

⁷⁴History, 21st Air Force, 1 January 1982-31 December 1984, 194. During operations at Point Salines, Army engineers placed a fuel bladder adjacent to the only active runway. In order for the C-130E “bladder bird” or fuel resupply aircraft to off-load fuel, the runway was closed until the process could be completed 30 minutes later. Five days later, the Army agreed to move the bladder to a taxiway freeing the runway for

after action reports reviewed in this research pointed out was the ability of US military personnel to find a way to accomplish the mission regardless of these obstacles.⁷⁵ Unity of effort requires leadership, planning, coordination and cooperation at all levels of command and among the joint and combined forces as well. The JTF Commander desired this condition, but did not actively promote complete unity of all the forces involved in the operation.

Clearly, the anarchy in Grenada resulted from the crumbling of the government which reached a climax with Bishop's death. What legitimacy, defined as "the willing acceptance of the right of a government to govern of a group or agency to make and enforce decisions," died with him.⁷⁶ Fortunately, Grenada did have a governor-general, Sir Paul Schoon. As a legal representative of the United Kingdom's Commonwealth, Sir Paul Schoon was internationally recognized as a legal ruler of Grenada when the dictatorship fell. The legitimacy of US intervention was cemented by the agreement of the neighboring nations to support our efforts.

Implications for Future LIC Operations

Operation Urgent Fury highlighted three important concepts for USAF employment in support of LIC. First, USAF operations in the LIC environment depend upon planning and coordination within the service and with joint and combined operators. Second, simple and established joint command and control is essential. Third, understanding the proper role and capabilities of unconventional and conventional air power employed in the same conflict is crucial to success. These concepts may seem obvious to air power strategists today, but in the heat of the moment, with the rush to

continuous operations. Also refer to the frequent unannounced runway crossings by Army helicopters. The 21st AF history contains excellent photographs of one such incident.

⁷⁵For example see General Duane H. Cassidy, Retirement Biography Interview, 32.

⁷⁶FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, 1-6.

send a great deal of combat power to a single point in space, the US Air Force of 1983 went to Grenada on a wing and a prayer.

Ad hoc planning was the method employed by the services in executing Operation Urgent Fury. The deployment of USAF units under separate commanders reflected the lack of a coherent theater operational plan. CINCLANT's decision to allow his staff to proceed without selecting an existing plan contributed to this problem. Certainly a sense of urgency was needed in this conflict, but operations plans are prepared and exercised to test the suitability of the forces needed to respond in a crisis. If the planning is inadequate, the national command authorities can choose to operate as they did in this case, but the operation may become more of a crisis than the conflict it attempts to solve. Despite the rapid mobilization, lack of adequate planning, and desire for all services to get a piece of the action, the assault accomplished all of the President's objectives.⁷⁷

Congress acknowledged this planning problem by directing the DOD to improve its joint planning process. The DOD reorganization directed by the Goldwater-Nichols Act strengthened the planning authority of the "warfighting" theater commanders-in-chief (CINCs). These plans are now exercised annually to test their adequacy for contingencies including low intensity conflicts.

Without a clear and understandable command and control structure, air power will become ineffective and potentially lethal to friendly forces. Air Force airpower had three flag officers. Special operations aircraft were directed by the commander of the Joint Special Operations Center until they were "chopped" to COMALF, Brigadier

⁷⁷William S. Lind, *Report to the Congressional Military Reform Caucus, Subject: The Grenada Operation*, 5 April 1984. In this highly controversial report to Congress, Mr. Lind, of the Military Reform Institute, a former staffer for then Senator Gary Hart, submitted a four page critique of military operations in Urgent Fury. He charged that the desire for each of the services to get a "piece of the pie" resulted in improper planning, execution and likely assisted the enemy resistance. Of note, he took no shots at USAF operations. He also stated that the performance of elite units such as Delta Force, SEALs, Rangers, etc. did not justify the money spent or their claims of eliteness. AU Library Document M-43828-U.

General Robert B. Patterson, at the end of the initial assault. TAC aircraft remained under the control of Brigadier General Richard L. Meyers aboard AWACS until he met Brigadier General Patterson at Point Salines. Naval and Army air remained responsible to their parent services. No single airman was in control of the air. No direct coordination between the tactical air forces and the airlift forces commanders was accomplished until four days after initiation of hostilities. Both general officers competently operated their forces on a non-interference basis, but no single commander was responsible to the Task Force Commander. AFM 1-1 is now structured with the concept of a single air component commander. The very concept of separate commanders for parts of an air campaign is contrary to our doctrine. AFM 1-1 states that “the essence of aerospace operational art is the planning and employment of air and space assets to maximize their contribution to the combatant commander’s intent.”⁷⁸ Even in the LIC environment, especially when combat is planned, success must come from one of the US military’s principles of war: unity of command.⁷⁹

Integration of conventional and unconventional air forces is an essential part of air power employment in low intensity conflict.⁸⁰ Low intensity conflicts often depend on high-risk, high-gain operations, where the talents of AFSOC and other airmobile special operations forces are especially suited. Conventional and special operators need to understand each others’ unique capabilities, limitations and missions prior to meeting at the scene of a low intensity conflict. Cold War mentalities and the need for secrecy have kept special operations and conventional operations apart. AFSOC is currently

⁷⁸AFM 1-1, Vol. I, 10.

⁷⁹Ibid., 16, Figure 3-1 on page 16 lists unity of command as an airman’s principle of war: “Unity of command is important for all forces, but it is critical to prudent employment of aerospace forces. Aerospace power is the product of multiple aerospace capabilities... Centralized command and control is the key to fusing these capabilities. The momentary misapplication of aerospace forces is much more likely to have immediate strategic consequences than is the case with surface forces.”

⁸⁰AFM 1-1, Vol. I, 14. The manual is very specific about the types of operations USAF special operations are likely to be involved and stresses the need for a joint special operations air component commander (JSOACC) who coordinates his actions “with the higher level joint forces air component commander (JFACC).

attempting to educate their forces, the rest of the USAF, and joint services to realize that today's conflicts require an operator's understanding of how to employ special operations effectively, both in combat as well as low intensity conflicts.⁸¹

Although not a textbook case for peacetime contingency operations in response to a LIC crisis, Operation Urgent Fury succeeded in restoring order in Grenada, safely evacuated some 350 US civilians, and defined a new path for the American military to explore.⁸² This new path enabled US political leadership to consider employment of the military to face future LIC challenges, such as counter-drug operations.

⁸¹Interview with Lt. Col. Randy P. Durham, HQ AFSOC/XPPD, May 20, 1994. AFSOC, The Role of SOF in the Air Campaign, December 1993, 11.

⁸²Op cit., 826.

3. Case Study: Operation Blast Furnace

By the mid-1980's, US national strategy recognized drug trafficking as a significant threat to our population. This form of low intensity conflict presented a significant challenge for the US military. Operation Blast Furnace exemplifies the complex issues involved in employing conventional armed forces in LIC situations. In contrast to the rapid and massive intervention on the small island of Grenada, Operation Blast Furnace was designed to interdict the economic source of cocaine, and employed less than 200 personnel over an area the size of France for a period of four months.⁸³ USAF participation in Operation Blast Furnace was primarily concerned with airlift support for the US Army and the US Drug Enforcement Agency as they assisted the Bolivian police. The key issues this case study highlights are joint, combined and interagency operations in a LIC environment; the role of airlift in support of austere operations; and the need for host nation support of the operation. Operation Blast Furnace is a little-known event to most Americans, but for airpower users, it serves as an effective lesson in the political dimension of low intensity conflict.

Background

After several years of increasing pressure from other nations, the government of Bolivia requested US assistance to deal directly with the drug trade. Eager to support his Latin American counterparts in stemming the flow of illicit drugs into the US, President Reagan initiated Operation Blast Furnace. This counter-drug operation placed an airmobile task force in Bolivia to assist the Bolivian anti-narcotics police force (UMOPAR). The US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), which was already in Bolivia operating a more modest program, joined the Army in this new operation. The airmobile

⁸³Lt. Col. Sewell H. Menzel, (USA Ret), "Operation Blast Furnace", *Army*, November 1989, 29.

task force led by the US Army consisted of 160 army operations, logistics, maintenance, intelligence, and security personnel from the 193rd Infantry Brigade. Their six UH-60A Black Hawk helicopters operated in an area about the size of France. This relatively microscopic force remained in Bolivia from July to November 1986.⁸⁴ As a low-key assistance effort, Operation Blast Furnace served as a benchmark for later efforts in the growing war on drugs.

The basic concept of operations for Blast Furnace called for US Army helicopters to airlift Bolivian Police to suspected cocaine processing labs in the isolated interior of the country. The airport of Trinidad in the center of Bolivia's cocaine lab district served as the Blast Furnace main operating base. From Trinidad, the Black Hawk crews deployed three helicopters, each containing a squad of Bolivian UMOPAR and some DEA agents, to forward operating locations at Josuani, Las Vegas, and San Javier.⁸⁵ Once deployed to one of these forward bases, the force would select a cocaine site, attack it, seize the lab, destroy the site, and detain any suspects. Because the US Army was operating the helicopters, they planned the missions and selected the sites to be attacked.

Operational details of the raids were not released to the Bolivian police until the raid was airborne for the selected target. Concerned with retaining surprise in the face of suspected security leaks to the drug traffickers, the US Army kept the UMOPAR troops out of the information loop. Despite the desire to keep the operation a secret, the press, the local government, and the traffickers were aware of the operation from the first deployment of forces to Bolivia from Panama.⁸⁶

The initial deployment of elements of the 193rd Infantry Brigade from its home base in Panama to Trinidad was performed by C-5A from the 436th Military Airlift Wing

⁸⁴Menzel, 25.

⁸⁵Michael H. Abbott, "The Army and the Drug War: Politics or National Security?", *Parameters*, December 1988, 102.

⁸⁶Op cit., 28.

(MAW) based at Dover AFB. Due to its large cargo capacity, one C-5A was able to transport all six Black Hawks from Howard AFB, Panama to Viru-Viru Airport, Santa Cruz, Bolivia in one sortie on July 15, 1986.⁸⁷ Two days later, the operation moved via USAF C-130s to its main operating base at the Bolivian Air Force Base near Trinidad.⁸⁸ Designed to be a low-key deployment, the C-5A Galaxy was met at Viru-Viru by US and Bolivian officials and the press. One Bolivian observer remarked that their request for assistance from the US was met with a Normandy invasion. His statement may seem exaggerated to US audiences, but, to Bolivians, the sight of the gigantic C-5A had a significant negative psychological and political impact on Bolivia. Within days, the population began to protest the government's role in the operation.⁸⁹

Once in place, the task force, code-named Janus, used the standard US Army method for planning and executing the operation, beginning with their Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB). The intelligence planners used what information US and Bolivian sources could supply. As is typical for many US LIC operations, the senior intelligence officer for Task Force Janus spoke no Spanish, nor did most of his staff.⁹⁰ While this personnel limitation restricted their ability to maximize their human intelligence (HUMINT) capability, the staff did a credible job of analyzing the Bolivian cocaine operations. The IPB accomplished by Task Force Janus identified the Bolivian cocaine operation's center of gravity: the cocaine processing lab.⁹¹ As the logistical support of the main and forward operating bases was worked out, the intelligence staff developed a list of targets to be assessed and assigned for attack. Within one week of initial deployment, Task Force Janus was ready to attack.

⁸⁷History, 436th Military Airlift Wing, Dover AFB, DE, 1 July-31 December 1986, Volume I, 28.

⁸⁸Abbott, 102.

⁸⁹Ibid, 104.

⁹⁰Lt. Col. John T. Fishel, "Developing a Drug War Strategy: Lessons From Operation Blast Furnace," *Military Review*, June 1991, 62.

⁹¹Ibid.

From start of operations to re deployment four months later, Task Force Janus had mixed success. Using a rapid raid technique, Blast Furnace destroyed over 22 labs, brought the cocaine production in Bolivia to a standstill, and sparked widespread political and economic turmoil in the country. The destruction of the laboratories removed the key link in the processing chain. Without the labs, local coca farmers had no market to sell their crop. An estimated 800 traffickers decided to take their business to neighboring countries.⁹² The price of a hundred pounds of coca leaves at market dropped from \$105 to \$15 by the end of the operation. This price was below half the cost needed for the growers to break even.⁹³ The glut of coca leaves in the Bolivian markets forced the growers to stop production in hopes that the market would return to previous levels.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the US presence in Bolivia added to the pressures already facing that government. A national strike along with frequent protests in the urban areas brought the government into crisis.⁹⁵ The Bolivian government had not weighed its desire to maintain favor with the US against the potential loss of public support at home. With over 100,000 Bolivians engaged in the growing of coca, the government took a great risk.⁹⁶ As the operation came to a close, the US Army began a training program to give the Bolivians the ability to carry on the fight.

The US Department of State supplied six UH-1s to Bolivia to continue the effort. US Army personnel gave training and logistical support to the combined DEA and UMOPAR follow-on counter-drug operations. Despite these efforts, the level of drug production and trafficking in Bolivia returned to pre-Blast Furnace levels by mid-1987. Several officials from inside the Bolivian government and US Army officers involved

⁹²Abbott, 103.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Menzell, 29.

⁹⁵Barry Crane et al. *Between Peace and War: Comprehending Low Intensity Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: National Security Program, JFK School of Government, Harvard, 1988, 77.

⁹⁶Op cit., 30.

with Operation Blast Furnace indicated internal Bolivian corruption as the cause.⁹⁷ While not viewed as a permanent success, Operation Blast Furnace served as a starting point in the effort to bring the growing counter-drug effort to the producing nations of Latin America.

USAF Support to Operation Blast Furnace

Airpower was key to the short-term success of Operation Blast Furnace. Counter-drug operations are heavily dependent upon air forces, especially in areas where the organic crops are grown and produced. Drug traffickers have also turned to the air to support logistically their geographically vast operations. The large geographic size of any counter-drug operational area virtually demands airpower. The sustainment of air operations is a vital and particularly difficult function in the large, remote areas characteristic of counter-drug activities. USAF airlift was able to meet this challenge by keeping helicopters at the forward operating bases adequately supplied with fuel, spare parts and other necessities.

The use of strategic airlift to support Operation Blast Furnace highlights the tradeoff between operational and political effectiveness in a low intensity conflict. Just as in Urgent Fury, the heavy lift capabilities of the C-5A Galaxy were used to bring the force to the operational area rapidly. From an operational perspective, C-5A support for this kind of operation was recognized as a good option by one of the senior leaders of the airlift support for Grenada, (then) Major General Duane Cassidy, 21st Air Force Commander.⁹⁸ Initially the aim was to move a single aircraft into Bolivia without much

⁹⁷Abbott, 106-107.

⁹⁸History, 21st Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1984, Interview with Major General D.H. Cassidy by E.D. Canivan, January 84. General Cassidy stated that the C-5A is a good choice for deploying special operations helicopters and their forces due to its in-flight refueling capability and size. General Cassidy was later to become CINCMAC.

notice, as opposed to a lengthy helicopter and accompanying airlift from Panama. The planning for heavy airlift to Bolivia was simplified by the fact that the country has but one airfield capable of supporting the C-5. Unfortunately, the press leak prevented any element of surprise or covertness. As word spread of the deployment, unrest among parts of the population over suspected US imperialism placed the Bolivian government in crisis. Smaller deployments over a longer period might have reduced the political impact.

Once in operation, the helicopter forces were resupplied by USAF C-130s. This effort required two types of resupply. At Trinidad, C-130s provided forward resupply of rations, logistical support and personnel rotation as needed. Fuel replenishment at forward operating locations was provided by a specially configured C-130. This “bladder bird” ferried fuel for immediate use or for off-loading to temporary storage on the ground for the deployed helicopters. This aerial bulk fuel delivery system can bring 3,000 gallons per sortie. In turn, fuel was stored at the austere forward operating locations in 500 gallon blivots, each capable of refueling two aircraft. At times during operations, daily fuel consumption by the Black Hawks reached 2,000 gallons per day. As simple and small as this method seemed, the operation had some difficulties.

Successful fixed wing resupply operations depend on runways capable of supporting airlift aircraft. Medium weight (135,000 pounds) C-130 aircraft require a runway that is at least 60 feet wide and 5,000 feet long. Runway hardness for these aircraft must exceed the International Civil Aviation Organization’s load classification number (LCN) of 25. Any runway that cannot meet these limitations will not support C-130 operations.⁹⁹

Bolivia and the other nations of South America lack a great deal of modern air infrastructure. This limits the operational employment of the majority of USAF airlift in

⁹⁹Michael C. Koster, Major, *Foreign Internal Defense: Does Air Force Special Operations Have What It Takes?*, Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, December, 1983, 81-82.

the theater including the C-130. To illustrate these limits, of the 10,262 airfields and helicopter pads in South America, only 443 are capable of supporting a medium weight C-130.¹⁰⁰ Although this may not seem limiting, the problem is compounded when climate, altitude and economic factors are added. Without adequate airfields to support our airlift needs, USAF support to LIC operations is severely limited. In Operation Blast Furnace, C-130 operators experienced first-hand the problems of austere operations in Bolivia.

During one of the raiding operations, a C-130E, operating on a fuel resupply mission to one of the forward bases, found the field to be less capable than required. After successfully off-loading its fuel load for the helicopters, the airlift crew was taxiing the transport to takeoff position when its main gear sank into the taxiway. The aircraft was not damaged, however it was unable to extricate itself. After two days of effort, additional C-130 support personnel flown to the field were able to move the aircraft to solid ground. The aircraft was inspected, declared flight-worthy, and once again taxied to takeoff position. This time, the aircraft sank on one side deep enough to cause impact of the wing tip and the blades of the outboard engine. After several days delay, the aircraft was rendered serviceable and flown away without further incident.¹⁰¹ Air operations in austere environments are especially challenging to forces geared to operate with a sophisticated logistical support structure. While any operation must be prepared to deal with the Clausewitzian notion of friction, planning and careful assessment of all aspects of operations can eliminate most of these kind of problems. When LIC operations depend upon a single air mission or other critical thread of support, commanders should insist upon sufficient resources to sustain operations.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 83.

¹⁰¹History, Southern Air Division, 24th Composite Wing, 1 July-31 December 1986, vol. 4, supporting document 152-153.

Since fuel is a critical consideration for air operations, interoperability of fuel equipment is equally important, especially in joint or combined LIC operations. The fuel fittings for the USAF C-130 “bladder bird” were not compatible with the US Army fuel systems. This incompatibility restricted the speed of fuel transfer and required “unique” field conditions solutions. Sustained operations above the planned rate for Operation Blast Furnace would not have been possible without compatible fittings. Since the operation did not require a high rate of sustained operations for more than a limited duration, workarounds were acceptable. CINCSO’s after action report to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stressed the need for inter service attention to these types of nagging interoperability problems.¹⁰² These logistical problems do not normally receive attention until they limit operations in the field. As joint and combined operations become the standard for air operations in low intensity conflicts, equipment interoperability is an essential requirement.

Mission accomplishment in LIC environments often requires air power for interception of air targets in addition to interdiction of ground targets. The original plan for Blast Furnace included the capability to monitor and control Bolivian airspace. Bolivian Air Force fighters were to intercept aircraft not in compliance with a planned national aircraft preflight registration program. Navy E-2C “Hawkeye” airborne early warning aircraft would locate these aircraft, then pass the information to the fighters for action. This part of the plan was not implemented. The reasons for opting for the simpler operation are not clear, but when one looks at the amount of cocaine seized by US interdiction efforts, the need for a counterair strategy seems clear. Nearly 60% of all cocaine seized by US agencies in 1986 was flown into the country by general and commercial aviation.¹⁰³ The Caribbean Radar Initiative has attempted to address this

¹⁰²Message(Secret), CINCSO to CJCS, “Blast Furnace Lessons Learned”, dated 061830Z DEC 86. Information extracted is unclassified.

¹⁰³Abbott, 108. 48 and 11 percent respectively.

problem over water, but the problem of airspace control in Latin America remains difficult to solve.¹⁰⁴ Even a limited amount of airspace surveillance is a difficult proposition, given the limited number of systems worldwide which are capable of accomplishing this task in most Latin American environments.

Operation Blast Furnace achieved the short term objective of its mission; however, other factors of the drug trafficking equation in South America prevented a permanent success. The immediate results achieved by this operation were a complete collapse of the coca market in Bolivia, significant training for elements of one US Army brigade and several USAF airlift crews and maintenance personnel, and a demonstration of the capability of US and Bolivian agencies to work together in a combined counter-drug operation.¹⁰⁵ When measured in numerical terms, Operation Blast Furnace discovered 22 cocaine labs, seized no significant amounts of cocaine and made no arrests.¹⁰⁶ When viewed in the larger context of the continuing drug war, the operation was only a temporary inconvenience to drug traffickers.

LIC Lessons Learned from Operation Blast Furnace

Operation Blast Furnace provided US leadership with a new look at the low intensity conflict challenges of the 1980's. Increasing pressure domestically and internationally to "do something" about the growing drug trade and its accompanying lawlessness caused the Reagan administration to conduct an experiment. When Bolivia asked for help, the US administration was eager to respond. Still evolving from the past experiences with LIC, the US military was called upon to operate on foreign soil for a limited duration (initially 60 days) under austere conditions. Since political sensitivities

¹⁰⁴USSOUTHCOM Briefing to USAF Air Command and Staff College, April 1993.

¹⁰⁵Op cit. 104.

¹⁰⁶Abbott, 95.

prohibited a massive military effort like that used in Grenada, a tailored response to this LIC challenge seemed appropriate. The results were important for future operations concerning LIC situations as well as conventional conflicts.

Drug trafficking can be seen as a domestic criminal or economic problem rather than as a “conflict”. Despite their lack of political goals, drug traffickers represent a threat to the peaceful conduct of government, both in the US and abroad. These international criminals have successfully subverted local and national governments and their constituents through intimidation or economic means to sustain their illicit trade. By 1986, most Latin American governments were unable to fight the drug cartels alone. Operation Blast Furnace was one attempt to find a balance between the need for politically acceptable operations and the requirements for effective military operations in LIC environments.

The after action comments of CINCSO are a good measure of his perspective on counter-drug operations. Several key improvements discussed in his message would improve the likelihood of future success of operations like Blast Furnace. First, CINCSO expressed the need to involve the theater CINC as early as possible during the planning stage. As was discussed in the case study on Grenada, the theater CINC and his staff provide the needed leadership and expertise for planning and allocating resources when the military is asked to resolve a conflict. Next, appearing to express some displeasure with the political nature of LIC operations, the report suggests that the military should decide how military forces should be employed. This belief is a traditional one of the military, but LIC requires adequate cooperation of all involved agencies to succeed. Additionally, CINCSO stressed the need for operations planning to consider the post-operations transition of the effort to local forces.¹⁰⁷ This point cannot be stressed enough. Little progress can be accomplished in LIC if the local people do not desire the

¹⁰⁷See note 13.

same objectives as their government. The current USAF doctrine on foreign defense assistance provides some of the answers to these problems.

According to Air Force Manual 2-11, *Air Force Operational Doctrine: Foreign Internal Defense*, USAF efforts to counter drug trafficking are guided by four specific foreign internal defense (FID) objectives:

- ♦ Train foreign military forces to employ and maintain aerospace systems and support facilities.
- ♦ Advise foreign military forces and governmental agencies on the correct use of aerospace power.
- ♦ Facilitate the transfer of US defense articles and services under the security assistance program to aviation units of eligible foreign governments engaged in internal defense and development (IDAD) operations.
- ♦ Provide direct support to host countries by furnishing (for example) humanitarian and civic assistance, tactical intelligence, communications support, logistic airlift, and combat firepower for tactical operations.¹⁰⁸

These objectives are based on the concept that the host nation will direct the overall effort for these operations while the US military supports the host nation's efforts. Blast Furnace clearly fit the older "Vietnam" model of US assistance, yet it also established an operational paradigm for Bolivia to follow with US assistance after the end of the initial operation. The important issue for Air Force planners to consider is the willingness of a country like Bolivia to continue its internal defense operations after US support has left. For reasons best known to the Bolivians, their effort to combat drug trafficking at home was unable to match the level of effort used in Operation Blast Furnace.¹⁰⁹ An experimental use of US military power to counter a LIC threat, Operation Blast Furnace

¹⁰⁸AFM 2-11, Aerospace Operational Doctrine, Foreign Internal Defense Operations, 1 January 1992, I-2.

¹⁰⁹Abbott, 107.

showed how difficult counter-drug operations are, but, more importantly, it demonstrated the impact of air power in LIC environments.

Our challenge in counter-drug operations, or in any operation that may have a significant political impact on the host country, is to plan and implement host nation led operations. These operations must center on the current host nation's capabilities, work on solving the central issues contributing to the conflict, and must be accomplished with minimum direct and collateral damage and injury. Most nations in conflicts short of war will likely take as much time to implement a solution as the problem took to occur. US contributions to these efforts must be tailored to meet the host nation's geographical, cultural, economic, and political landscape.¹¹⁰ Considering the domestic turmoil and negligible long-term impact on the Bolivian drug trade, Operation Blast Furnace did not fully meet this standard.

As the supporting service in Operation Blast Furnace, the Air Force identified three important issues for joint LIC operations: the need to consider the political dimension of aircraft deployments; the importance of planning and airlift for operations in large, austere areas; and the fact that friction, even though it cannot be eliminated from any operation, can have limited effects if there is sufficient planning. USAF support to LIC operations like Operation Blast Furnace should extend beyond generation of airlift sorties. Joint planning for a more comprehensive, long term approach to the drug trafficking problem in the region could have identified alternatives such as Aviation FID. Military planners must be reminded that low intensity conflict resolution requires a great deal of thought about the political, economic, and psychological implications of a course of action.

¹¹⁰Interview with Majors Michael Longoria, HQ USAF/XOXS and Andrew Weaver, HQ USAF/XOXD, May 27, 1994.

4. Case Study: Operation Just Cause

As the 1980s came to a close, drug trafficking continued to remain a threat. With the limited success of host nation efforts and growing domestic pressure to win the “war on drugs”, President Bush progressively increased the use of military forces to stem the flow of narcotics from Latin America. From spring 1988 through the summer of 1989, tensions grew in Panama between the military regime of General Manuel Noriega and the US forces stationed in the Panama Canal Zone.¹¹¹ Three events persuaded the President to chose military force to oust Noriega: continuing abuse of off-duty American soldiers and civilians as far back as 1987; repeated incidents of automatic weapons fire and armed intrusions of US military bases beginning in 1988; and, finally, the declaration of a state of war by the Panamanian government and the shooting death of an American Marine Corps officer (December 15-16, 1989).¹¹² A series of US exercises during this period prepared the US Southern Command for operations if the situation required. The combat operations that began on December 20, 1989 resulted in the removal of Noriega and the installation of a democratic government.

This case study will discuss the background of Operation Just Cause, examine USAF operations in Operation Just Cause and identify specific lessons learned from the operation. The results of this operation provide an interesting counterpoint to those of Operation Urgent Fury. Of particular interest are the impact of increased emphasis on combining special operations forces with conventional airpower in LIC and the continuing difficulties of command and control of airpower in an armed intervention.

¹Report of the Committee on International Arms Control and Security Affairs and The Committee on International Law of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, *The Use of Armed Force in International Affairs: The Case of Panama*, 1992, 17-22.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

Background

The status of Panama has been a strategic concern of the United States for over a century.¹¹³ Recent events included the signing of the treaty that would return the Canal and the surrounding US territory to Panamanian control by 1999. US influence in Panama's internal affairs along with frequent coups is a recurring theme in Panama's history. Manuel Noriega came to power just five years after the previous military leader had resigned and opened the political process.¹¹⁴ By 1987, US leaders began to desire Noriega's departure from leadership of the country.

Preliminary military planning for what was to become Operation Just Cause began in February 1988. US Southern Command developed a series of contingency plans, called the "Prayer Book," which provided for defensive operations in the old Canal Zone, non-combatant evacuation, offensive operations to neutralize the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) and follow-on civil military operations after order was restored.¹¹⁵ In 1989, allegations of election fraud and use of the Panamanian national banking for laundering money from illegal weapons and drugs sales led the US government to indict Noriega on drug trafficking, to place an economic freeze of all Panamanian assets held in US banks, and to demand that Noriega resign and go in exile.¹¹⁶

Noriega's response to these moves was to build up Panama's military capability and to encourage harassment of the US personnel stationed in the country.¹¹⁷ The harassment of US personnel climaxed in a shooting death of an American Marine

¹¹³John B. Hattendorf, editor, *Mahan on Naval Strategy*, xx, 29. Mahan as much as dared his military and political readers to build the canal in 1890.

¹¹⁴Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty, editors, *Panama: A Country Study*, xxvii-xxviii.

¹¹⁵History, 830th Air Division and 24th Composite Wing, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 107-108.

¹¹⁶Report of the Committee on International Arms Control and Security Affairs and The Committee on International Law of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, *The Use of Armed Force in International Affairs: The Case of Panama*, 1992, 15-17.

¹¹⁷Kevin Buckley, *Panama, The Whole Story*, 161.

Lieutenant who had been detained at a roadblock in Panama City. His death, and the reported sexual mistreatment of a dependent wife of another US officer detained just prior to the shooting, was the catalyst for the President's decision to act.¹¹⁸ Operation Just Cause began on December 18th when the Commander in Chief of US Southern Command (USCINCSO), General Maxwell Thurman, received the JCS Execute Order to implement his operations order 1-90.

As USCINCSO, General Thurman possessed a sizable force of 10,000 permanently stationed personnel and 2,000 more troops on temporary exercises called "Nimrod Dancer." This force was augmented by 14,000 deployed personnel.¹¹⁹ The four major objectives of Operation Just Cause were to neutralize the Panamanian Defense Forces, to protect US citizens and treaty rights, to remove Manuel Noriega from power, and to establish a democratic government in Panama.¹²⁰ To accomplish these objectives, twenty-seven simultaneous and separate raids, airdrops, and attacks were carried out against eleven different locations with H-hour set for 0045 Panama time on December 20th.¹²¹ US forces employed relatively few heavy units, as the operations plans anticipated a brief conflict against lightly armed Panamanian forces.¹²²

¹¹⁸Ibid., 226-227.

¹¹⁹History, 830th Air Division and 24th Composite Wing, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 111-112.

¹²⁰Ibid., 112. The units and sizes involved were the 7th Infantry Division, 1x brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, 1x mechanized brigade of the 5th Mechanized Division, 1x battalion of the Marine Task Force, 3x battalions of US Army Rangers, 1x Task Force of Navy Seals from Special Warfare Group 2, elements of the 7th Special Forces Group, 193rd Light Infantry Brigade as well as air assets assigned to the 830th Air Division and deployed elements of the 1st Special Operations Wing.

¹²¹History, 23rd Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, xv.

¹²²History, 830th Air Division and 24th Composite Wing, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 111-112.

USAF Support to Operation Just Cause

The USAF operations in support of Operation Just Cause took advantage of several important changes that were just beginning to have an effect on the service. First, special operations had been given increased attention for the past six years. The result was a dramatic force projection capability far in excess of the one used in Grenada. Also, the enactment of legislation to improve “jointness” in US military planning and operations was beginning to force the services to work together. In addition to these two organizational developments, dramatic improvements in communications technology enhanced the command and control of all forces participating in Just Cause.

As in Grenada six years earlier, airlift and special operations were the key USAF contributions to this peacetime contingency operation. From the airlift perspective, MAC had already used 34 C-5, 39 C-141 and two commercially leased L-1011 missions in one week to deliver 2,679 soldiers and Marines and their 2,950 tons of equipment to Panama during Nimrod Danger in May.¹²³ Under presidential order, MAC evacuated 5,915 people over a seven week period, several months before Operation Just Cause began.¹²⁴ To support the invasion, MAC planned to use 63 C-141s, 21 C-130s, and 2 C-5s. The C-5s performed the unique mission of forward deployment of special operations helicopters

By the time of Operation Just Cause, USAF special operations had been organized into the 23rd Air Force (MAC) and integrated, along with the other services special operators, into a new unified command, US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Additionally, USAF Special Operations units would now train and fight

¹²³Military Airlift Command Office of History, *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command 1941-1991*, 195.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

jointly with the other services' special operators.¹²⁵ By December 1989, this arrangement had been in place for two years.

USAF special operations employed 22 special operations aircraft flying 442 sorties, logging over 1200 hours of combat time with only one mission abort.¹²⁶ The key to Panama, as in Grenada, was the capture and return to operations of two key airfields near Panama City: Rio Hato and Tocomen-Torrijos. Once the initial assault had succeeded, each airfield was reinforced with US Army Airborne troops and USAF support personnel who initiated the control of airlanding of heavy reinforcements.

The seizure of Rio Hato provides an excellent example of how airpower supported the operation. The purpose of the raid was to seize the airfield which was adjacent to one of the PDF's infantry compounds. The task force responsible for the raid was code named Task Force Red. TF Red consisted of 15 C-130E¹²⁷ equipped with an adverse weather air delivery system (AWADS) with some 800 paratroops from the 75th Ranger Regiment aboard, one UH-60 Black Hawk equipped with forward area refuel/rearming capability (FARRP), four AH-6 Apache attack helicopters, two F-117As and one AC-130H gunship.¹²⁸ The raid saw several firsts for American airpower, as in the first acknowledged use of the F-117A stealth fighter in combat. The F-117As were

¹²⁵Ibid., 188.

¹²⁶History, 23rd Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, xv. The list of aircraft and units involved included 3x MC-130E, 8th SOS; 5x MH-53J, 20th SOS; 2x AC-130A, 711th SOS, AFRES; 4x MH-60G, 55th SOS, 3x HC-130 P/N, 9th SOS; 3x HC-130P/N, 1550th CCTW; 2x EC-130E, 193rd SOS, PA ANG.

¹²⁷History, 317th Tactical Airlift Wing, 1 July-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 22. These C-130Es from the 317th TAW were equipped with the AWADS or adverse weather aerial delivery system which allows these aircraft to accomplish low altitude airdrops for special operations missions. These missions called SOLL I and SOLL II missions are accomplished by specially qualified MAC C-130 crews who are capable of using night vision goggles to take-off, land and fly over blackout airfields. SOLL stands for Special Operations Low Level with I for daylight and II for night.(MAC History Office, *Anytime...*, 195. See note 80.)

¹²⁸Op cit., 161.

led the attack by stunning and disorienting the PDF's 6th and 7th Infantry Companies as they slept in their barracks.¹²⁹

The mission to Rio Hato had two objectives: to seize and hold the airfield; and to neutralize Noriega's Battalion 2000.¹³⁰ Just prior to their final target run, the fighters were instructed by the National Command Authorities to drop their 2,000 lb. bombs near enough to the barracks to frighten the troops, but to minimize casualties. The attack produced an effect not unlike turning over an ant hill. The arriving Rangers were met by hostile small arms fire as the PDF mounted a light defense. Just as in Grenada, the Rangers chose to drop from low altitude.¹³¹ The field was taken and an Airlift Control Element (ALCE) was established. Within several hours the Rangers were reinforced with heavy equipment.

One other first which occurred that night at Rio Hato demonstrated the old special forces adage, "high risk, high gain." Shortly after the first MC-130 accomplished a short-field landing on a blacked runway with the crew using night vision goggles (NVG), the crew discovered that the Black Hawk's FARRP kit was damaged, preventing the planned refueling of the attack helicopters. The USAF crew assisted the Army forces by refueling and rearming the helicopters by hand from their MC-130. The small arms fire from the barracks caused a fire in one of the Combat Talon's engines requiring its shutdown. With the three remaining engines running, the MC-130 crew taxied to the highway that was just beyond the end of the Rio Hato strip, and, with the approval of

¹²⁹Interview with Majors Michael Longoria, HQ USAF/XOXS and Andrew Weaver, HQ USAF/XOXS, May 27, 1994. Major Longoria was a participant in the Rio Hato raid as an Air Force Combat Controller inserted in the first airdrop. He was directly responsible for all initial air traffic into and out of Rio Hato after it was secured.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

¹³¹Kevin Buckley, *Panama, The Whole Story*, 1991, 238-240. Buckley's account implies the retargeting of the F-117s resulted in a stiffer defense requiring the Rangers to request a jump at 375 feet. In Grenada, similar defense of Point Salines airport caused the Rangers to attempt a similar jump at 500 feet. This tactic was validated and became standard operating procedure for airfield envelopment in the US Army. Buckley reports that the jump from 375 feet was "an orthopedic nightmare" as over 10% of the jumpers sustained broken limbs on impact. An additional 23 US soldiers died in the assault including one Ranger shot in the door of the aircraft as he jumped.

23rd Air Force successfully, took off using NVGs. To 23rd AF's knowledge, this mission was the first of its kind.¹³²

The rest of the USAF story at Rio Hato involved the AC-130H gunship. Deployed directly from their stateside base at Hurlburt AFB, Florida, an AC-130H crew managed to mount an impressive record at Rio Hato. The gunship's mission involved neutralizing the PDF 6th and 7th Infantry Companies that were then resisting the invasion. Using a 105mm cannon, the gunship crew leveled the barracks complex. In addition, all weapons on the aircraft were used to destroy three anti-aircraft artillery batteries and three V300 armored personnel carriers. Enemy casualties were listed at 28.¹³³

As in Grenada, USAF combat control teams (CCTs) played an important role in providing command and control of the airfield immediately after the initial assault. Eighteen Combat Control Team members parachuted into Rio Hato with the Rangers at H-hour. These men established air traffic control and a direct communications link to the joint special operations task force headquarters and provided ground fire support direction to the AC-130H gunship overhead.¹³⁴ This time jointness, equipment, and training paid off despite the initial problems caused by the loss of initial surprise from the F-117 attack. Once the initial raids on Panama were complete, resistance to US forces quickly fell apart.

During the first hours of the operation, command and control of USAF special operations gunships was not centralized. As the operation began, two special operations controlled MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft launched from Howard AFB as planned. The air traffic controller in Howard's tower was unaware of the mission, and reacted according to his checklist for airbase defense. The alert condition for the field at the time

¹³²History, 23rd Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1989. Volume 1, 161.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid.

included the positioning of two USAF Reserve AC-130A gunships on strip alert, ready for immediate launch, to defend the base. These aircraft and their crews, having just completed their annual exercises, were to return to Hurlburt before the operation began but were reassigned hours before the intervention began.¹³⁵

The Howard AFB command post was equally unaware of any scheduled aircraft movements, and reacted to the same checklist by ordering the launch of the alert gunships. The departure of the two MC-130s, controlled by a separate special operations command post, blocked the launch of the gunships. Once the runway was clear, the reservists took off and were later tasked with fire support operations for the duration of the conflict.¹³⁶ These crews would later claim to be the first USAF reservists to enter combat operations without presidential call-up.¹³⁷

The confusion between command posts continued for several hours. At one point in the reservists' mission, the two command posts and a forward air controller both attempted to control one of the gunships, with each assigning the aircraft a separate call sign. After a very confusing few hours, the aircraft commander directed the crew and the command posts to use only one of the call signs.¹³⁸

Adding to the confusion in the air were as many as seven gunships airborne over the operational area at one time. The various command elements on the ground, both tactical and operational, diverted fire support missions. Since the operation began at night, it was impossible for gunship crews to know where all the other missions were. One aircraft commander first became aware of another gunship presence above and behind him when he noticed 20mm tracer rounds passing within several yards of his cockpit window on their way to a ground target. When the Joint Air Commander for

¹³⁵Interview with Clay T. McCutchen, HQ AFSOC Command Historian, by the author, May 20, 1994.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷History, 23rd Air Force, 1 January-31 December 1989. Volume 1, 158.

¹³⁸Op cit.

Operation Just Cause, Lieutenant General Peter T. Kempf, became aware of this situation, he directed the consolidation of the command posts by the end of the first day of operations.¹³⁹

One interesting joint employment of airpower was the “Ma Bell” approach. When US Army forces were faced with armed resistance at secondary military facilities, the ground troops had the AC-130 gunship circle overhead, signaling its presence to the enemy force. The ground force then called the garrison and demanded its surrender via commercial telephone lines. Over 2,000 PDF troops in outlying garrisons were captured with only one slight injury to a PDF soldier and no US casualties.¹⁴⁰ In one case, an AC-130 used its searchlights to illuminate 300 PDF troops as they surrendered. The aircraft was able to group the men on a runway for assault forces to round them up.¹⁴¹ The MH-53 Pave Low helicopter’s guns were also respected sufficiently, so that the mere presence of the aircraft overhead silenced enemy shooting.¹⁴² In a low threat environment, special operations aircraft provided substantial firepower that temporarily compensated for the dearth of heavily armed units on the ground.

USAF crews participated in the hunt for Manuel Noriega where airpower proved to be the key ingredient. One typical raid was on a beach house where he was suspected of hiding. One MH-53 Pave Low and one AH-6 supported by an AC-130H placed Navy SEALs on the target shore three hours prior to the assault. The house was searched, yielding many documents for intelligence purposes, but no casualties and no Noriega.¹⁴³ Eventually, Noriega was apprehended

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰New York Times, January 11, 1990 from Buckley, 242.

¹⁴¹Op cit., 169.

¹⁴²Ibid., 167-168.

¹⁴³Ibid., 170.

and transported to Homestead AFB, Florida by MC-130E from the 8th SOS to await trial, conviction and imprisonment.¹⁴⁴

LIC Lessons Learned from Operation Just Cause

Operation Just Cause can be characterized as a military solution to a political problem. USAF airpower provided the necessary support to carry out the operation in a rapid and controlled manner. While showing an improved ability to support a massive, rapid intervention, USAF operations still had areas of concern future support to LIC situations. Two areas of concern which directly impacted planning and operating in LIC were identified in USAF after action reports. The first identified area is the problem of command and control of airpower during an armed intervention. The examples of the USAF Reserve gunship's inadvertent launch and their later mission with three different call signs would not have occurred if conventional and unconventional operations were centrally controlled at the operational level. With as many as seven gunships flying and firing in a small airspace, centralized command and control prevents confusion and in extreme cases avoids friendly fire. General Kempf's decision to consolidate command posts avoided confusion and tragedy. Centralized command and control of airpower during a low intensity conflict maximizes operational effectiveness of the units involved, allows proper allocation of limited assets and limits losses due to friendly fire.

The second problem area identified in Operation Just Cause is the use of a planning process that assumed the conflict would be short and involve relatively few tactical assets.¹⁴⁵ The key issue with "underplanning" an operation like Just Cause is the difficulty of deciding how much force structure is required initially, and having enough planning flexibility to call on more forces or re-deploy assets as the situation changes. In Operation Just Cause, the hunt for Noriega was more difficult than originally

¹⁴⁴Ibid., xv.

¹⁴⁵History, 830th Air Division and 24th Composite Wing, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 121.

envisioned and as a result the forces were adjusted. These problems are not unique to the Air Force, but they have joint service implications for future LIC operations.

Less than a month after the conclusion of Operation Just Cause, the commander of the 830th Air Division, Brigadier General Robin G. Tornow, discussed these two problem areas with his staff and the commanders of his subordinate units. Tornow believed that the mixing of special operations and conventional forces simultaneously, as in Just Cause, would be the prototype for contingency operations in the future.¹⁴⁶ The political sensitivities of LIC operations require all players to operate from one playbook. Successful coordination of conventional and special operations begins in the planning process where both forces can discuss their parts of the operation. Coordination of special operations and conventional missions continues through execution as the joint special operations air component commander and his staff work with the joint force air component commander (JFACC).¹⁴⁷ Lower echelons of the air control system need to have a complete picture as well to minimize the potential for fratricide and allow full synergy of combined conventional and special operations. The planning for Operation Just Cause did not provide for full integration of USAF conventional and special operations mission.

General Tornow indicated that the minimum requirements for coordination during contingency planning are rules of engagement, airspace control and communications plans.¹⁴⁸ Since the theater command had extensive preparation time for the operation, the kinds of coordination problems experienced by the gunships should have been minimized.

FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 states that one of the keys to effective peacetime contingency operations is the selection of appropriate forces for the type of contingency faced by the

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷AFM 1-1, *Basic Airpower Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, March 1992, 14.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

national leadership. In a situation such as Operation Just Cause, these forces will have planned and trained to execute similar operations through exercises, just as the SOUTHCOM troops did in the months prior to December 1989. However, FM 100-20 stresses that peacetime contingency operations rarely allow enough time for other forces to train to the standard required for success in the operation.¹⁴⁹ This standard requires planners to develop contingency plans that maximize the use of forces familiar with the LIC situation in their area, and assign those forces trained and ready to accomplish the operation. Adding other forces that do not have the needed experience should be avoided.

The planners for the Panama operation appear not to have considered two important aspects of the conflict: how long the operation would take to complete; and the command and control, logistics, communications and other support functions required to conduct the operation. Operation Just Cause plans assumed that the “war” would be short and involve a relatively small number of tactical air assets. Once operations commenced, the air operations center was unable to handle all the air activity and effectively integrate air with land operations. The Air Forces Commander or Joint Air Force Commander, as he is called today, was not even present in Panama during the initial phases of the operation.¹⁵⁰ As a result, the growth of the center with augmentation personnel created “impromptu organizational relationships.” The Tactical Air Control System (TACS) established to direct the air war used procedures that did not fit joint doctrine of tactical air support to the Army. According to General Tornow, this too-flexible approach led to joint task force “players” not understanding the proper

¹⁴⁹FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, Washington, DC, 5 December 1990, 5-1. Coordination is one of the three principles uniquely important to peacetime contingency operations: coordination, balance, and planning for uncertainty.

¹⁵⁰Interview with Jerome W. Klingaman, USAF Center for LIC, May 10, 1994 with author.

functioning of the USAF TACS or its role in relation to US Army Fire Support Coordination Elements .¹⁵¹

The key operational results of USAF support to Operation Just Cause were the successful integration of conventional and special operations on airfield seizure missions, and the reinforcement of the requirement for effective command and control of these forces. The emphasis on special operations forces since Grenada clearly improved the effectiveness of USAF special operations in contingency operations. This gain was partially offset by the problems encountered with the command and control of these operations. Growing emphasis on joint operations, combined with the use of military force to resolve political problems like a drug trafficking dictator, requires continued refinement of the planning and execution of USAF operations to support operations like Just Cause.

¹⁵¹History, 830th Air Division and 24th Composite Wing, 1 January-31 December 1989, Volume 1, 122-123.

5. The Future of USAF Support to LIC

The case studies presented in this paper provide several lessons for future USAF support of low intensity conflicts. In this concluding chapter, I will review and summarize these lessons. Following this synthesis, I will present a brief personal view of the future, including the implications this future has on low intensity conflict and USAF operations directed to support LIC operations. The continuing growth of low intensity conflicts will further challenge our national policies and USAF abilities to operate effectively in these environments. Any unresolved lessons from the past will require our service to examine ways to adapt to these low intensity conflict challenges.

The world of today is dramatically different from the world of the 1980's. The demise of the Warsaw Pact and the bipolar confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States has exposed the continuing problems of regional conflicts. The absence of superpower influence in the regions where most low intensity conflicts exist has not fully ended the problems of insurgency, terrorism, or drug trafficking. Donald M. Snow suggests that these conflicts "were, and are, debates about the survival and then development to allow the countries of the South into the prosperity of the North."¹⁵² Our experiences in Latin American operations such as those discussed in this paper seem to bear this out.

I believe this gap between the prosperous nations and the less developed nations will continue to require our nation's assistance to address the related causes of LIC it produces. As the world's leader in so many measures of power, including political, economic and military, the US will continue to pursue a path of involvement to assist other nations. Whether the need of the economically poorer nations is security, famine relief, or economic debt restructuring, our nation has resources that can be used. Many

¹⁵²Donald M. Snow, *Third World Conflict and American Response in the Post-Cold War World*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, March 5, 1991, 13.

newly emerging nations like those of the former Soviet bloc require our expertise in development of political, economic and military systems to assist their transition to democracy and free enterprise. Other nations will continue to play out age old tribal, ethnic or religious battles with sporadically intense fighting as has been seen in Bosnia, Somalia and the independent republics of the former Soviet Union.

These conflicts will require some measure of US response. From the growing peacekeeping missions of the United Nations to discussions of intervention in Haiti, the spectrum of possible LIC situations has never been fuller. In contrast to the growth of these conflicts, our military capabilities to deal with them will likely decrease. This disparity will become most visible when a response to multiple LIC crises is requested by our national leadership. Our responses to crises in the 1980's does not provide us with a ready set of military options that can address all forms of low intensity conflict.

The experience of intervention in Grenada gave us a method for seizing an island nation rapidly to protect American lives and restore order. The military learned that joint operations are best performed with careful planning and centralized command and control of the military forces used. Operation Urgent Fury proved that the military could be employed in operations below the level of war. Adherence to two principles outlined in

FM 100-20/AFP 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, political dominance and legitimacy, by our national leadership kept control of political dimension of this low intensity conflict. The principle of unity of effort was not achieved in this operation. Lack of joint planning, decentralized command and control of air forces and poor communications hampered the early stages of the operation. USAF conventional and special operations forces were sent to Grenada with three different air commanders. Despite this lack of command unity, successful airfield seizure and airlift sustainment of ground forces was accomplished. The lack of a significant opposition and overwhelming force applied to the conflict enabled its successful conclusion.

In Operation Blast Furnace, US military units learned about the difficulties of interdicting a source of drug trafficking at its core. With a small land force commitment to a vast area of operations, airpower provided the necessary mobility to carry out strikes on cocaine labs in Bolivia. Operational success of USAF missions to rapidly deploy forces to Bolivia resulted in a dramatic negative impact on the host nation's government. Tactical airlift missions to provide fuel to austere forward operating bases enabled operational flexibility for US Army helicopters conducting the raids. These airlift missions were limited by the small amount of serviceable airfields in the country, and experienced difficulties with poorly prepared taxiways and fuel equipment incompatibilities. Repair operations increased the visibility of US military personnel in Bolivia, bringing the potential for further political unrest and protest to their presence. The removal of the operation from Bolivia negated the operational impact it had gained.

Operation Just Cause demonstrated the ability of military force to bring about political change in a target country. USAF operations in support of this intervention benefited from increased emphasis on special operations since Operation Urgent Fury. Although prior planning and exercises improved the quality of joint operations, USAF conventional and special operations forces were still subjected to decentralized command and control in the first day of operations. The problems of senior leadership and communications capabilities that existed in Grenada had been resolved. The issue of integration of USAF units involved in a large contingency operation through a central command and control system was not fully realized.

The ability of USAF operations to support low intensity conflict in the future is more a question of how well, rather than not if. Special operations units have proven that they can seize airfields, provide on-demand close air support, and even reconnaissance when needed. Conventional airlift has demonstrated its ability to support joint drug interdiction operations. The difficulty in supporting low intensity conflict for USAF operations lies beyond what has been demonstrated in the 1980's.

Recommendations

Given that low intensity conflict is likely to remain a concern for national policy makers, how should the US Air Force position itself to provide effective support for future LIC operations? I believe the three case studies I have discussed indicate four areas for improvement. These areas are discussed hereafter, with specific suggestions on how each can be addressed.

• USAF Acceptance of LIC Doctrine

Low intensity conflict has never enjoyed wide acceptance by the mainstream Air Force. At the time of Operation Urgent Fury, USAF doctrine did not match the requirements of low intensity conflict. By 1990, USAF began to accept the idea of assisting the army with conflict short of war. Today, joint doctrine for these conflicts is about to become final. The question of service acceptance of joint doctrine remains unanswered. Having a doctrine is important, but equally important is the manner in which a military service organizes itself to carry out its principles.

To be an effective, supporting force in low intensity conflict operations, USAF plans, training, and force structure must be sufficiently developed to meet the joint doctrine requirements. Choosing to eliminate FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 in favor of joint doctrine is appropriate, only if USAF intends to perform those parts of the LIC mission for which airpower is best suited. Joint doctrine is only as good as the services decide it should be. Since resolution of low intensity conflict, like those I have presented, is directly dependent on airpower, USAF operational capabilities must be prepared to meet the challenge.

Joint doctrine provides a point of departure for education of all services, including the Air Force, on how the nation's military should be used to resolve low intensity

conflicts. In my career, my first fully detailed exposure to LIC concepts and doctrine occurred at staff college. I suspect that my experience is not unique. Solutions to low intensity conflict do not fit the conventional force missions most military personnel are trained to execute. As a result, we are often mentally and physically unprepared to match our capabilities to the tasks found in low intensity conflict.

Acceptance of joint doctrine for conflicts short of war would begin the process of educating USAF about its role in LIC. From unit level training to advanced PME, some discussion of conflict short of war exists today. This learning needs to be tailored to match the principles discussed in joint doctrine and assist the force in understanding the differences between operations in LIC situations and war. Once we learn our parts in supporting LIC operations, we can better organize, train and equip those units that will accomplish these missions. Without service emphasis on learning joint doctrine, particularly for operations short of war, we run the risk of misapplication of airpower to meet these challenges.

• **Development of USAF LIC Capabilities**

If acceptance of doctrine begins the learning process of the USAF role in LIC, then development of USAF capabilities to operate in low intensity conflict provides the means to carry out LIC support. Clearly, a great deal of our capabilities today reside with the special operators in AFSOC. Other commands find themselves engaged in LIC operations as well. Some of these capabilities will have applications at any point along the spectrum of conflict from peace to war. Others will be best applied to conflict short of war.

One of the keys to developing USAF LIC capabilities is improving service wide knowledge and use of the capabilities we already possess. The service capabilities for LIC support operations will depend upon the successful integration of conventional and

special operations forces. The use of these dissimilar forces to accomplish one goal requires the development of the ability to communicate organizationally between the two distinct communities. The LIC environment brought these worlds together in Grenada and Panama, but there remains a cultural difference between them that must be addressed.

During the Cold War, special operations were conducted with a great deal of secrecy. This “black world” mentality was necessary to insure our potential enemies were unable to know our capabilities, intentions and operations. Unfortunately, special operations kept a great deal of the conventional forces in the US military, including the USAF, equally ignorant of their capabilities. The result is a tension between conventional and special operations that is unproductive when they are need to operate together. AFSOC officials recognize this problem. Lieutenant Colonel Randy Durham, HQ AFSOC, believes that two kinds of education about special operations are required. First, special operators will have to be told by the command that it is acceptable to discuss special operations with their conventional counterparts. Second, conventional operators need to learn about how special operations can contribute to conflict resolution.¹⁵³ Once the wall between the two worlds begins to fall, integration of conventional and special operations will become more complete.

Some special operations capabilities for LIC support suffer from a lack of adequate resources. An important part of LIC operations is targeting the center of gravity (COG) of the conflict. As I discussed in the introduction to this paper, the population and their minds are often the COG of the conflict. Psychological warfare (PSYOPS) is one of the methods we can employ to communicate with them. One successful USAF capability is the EC-130E Volant Solo of the Air National Guard’s 193rd Special Operations Group, based at Harrisburg International Airport, Middletown, Pennsylvania.¹⁵⁴ These *five*

¹⁵³Interview with Lt. Col. Randy Durham, HQ AFSOC/XPPD by the author, May 20, 1994.

¹⁵⁴John T. Correll, ed., “Reports From Major Commands,” *Air Force Magazine*, May 1994, 69.

aircraft provide several direct communication methods for such use. However, with over 30 potential conflicts that may require their deployment world-wide, this scarce resource is not a sufficient allocation to support even one (PSYOPS) conflict for an extended period. To fully develop USAF capabilities to support LIC operations, we need the tools and the corporate communication required.

- **Joint/Combined LIC Planning and Exercises**

These case studies highlight the need for careful planning for LIC operations. Within each study, planning (or the lack thereof) directly impacted upon the ability of the forces involved to execute the desired strategy. Without joint planning for LIC operations, no coordinated air plan would be developed. Each service would have its own plan for the operation. Our current joint theater command system, such as what was used in Desert Storm, has placed all of the air planners for a war on one staff. The Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) staff has the experts needed to produce plans for war operations. This same organization can fill a similar role in LIC.

Had the planning staff for Operation Urgent Fury been formalized with a staff from all services and various government agencies who knew each other from previous exercises, a more coherent and effective plan and mix of forces would have been the likely result. This staff could also recommend proper force composition, deployment, and operations timing to optimize operations to fit the situation. Problems like placing fuel bladders next to the active runway that prevented continuous operations, incompatible fuel attachments, or using a high-profile C-5 on a low-profile, politically sensitive mission could be addressed during planning and surfaced during exercises.

Operation Just Cause was successful due in part to joint planning and months of exercise preparation. Goldwater-Nichols seems to have successfully brought jointness to

planning and exercising for war in Desert Storm. A similar joint emphasis on joint planning and exercises is needed for LIC operations.

- **Centralized Command and Control of Air Operations**

Problems with a lack of centralized command and control of USAF support were evident in both Operation Urgent Fury and Operation Just Cause. Despite the learning of the lesson that required one airman as commander of joint air operations in Operation Just Cause, conventional and special operations remained under separate operational control for the opening hours of the conflict. In Operation Urgent Fury, separate general officers led their part of the air operation for the first four days, but neither could control the army directly.

The reason for centralized control of air forces is equally important in LIC operations as it is in war. AFM 1-1 is clear on this issue:

Aerospace forces should be centrally controlled by an airman to achieve advantageous synergies, establish effective priorities, capitalize on unique strategic and operational flexibilities, ensure unity of purpose, and minimize the potential for conflicting objectives.¹⁵⁵

Fortunately, in Grenada, the distance separating the air defense and the tactical airlift forces, as well as the common sense approach applied to the situation by both USAF generals, kept the operation safe. In Panama, even the temporary lack of control resulted in confusion and the potential for loss of aircraft and their crews. This lack of control is evidenced by the three call sign mission, the confusion at the Howard AFB tower during the opening moments of the operation, and the overcrowded airspace over Panama City with seven gunships operating simultaneously. In the politically charged situations of

¹⁵⁵ AFM 1-1, *Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force*, March 1992, 8.

low intensity conflict, planning, prior to start of operations, should include all the organizations that will participate. Exercising similar operations is an effective method for identifying shortfalls in procedures for control.

Conclusion

LIC defines the “battlefield” differently than the classic force on force paradigm of conventional conflict. This different fight requires doctrine, service wide capabilities, joint planning, and centralized command and control of forces tailored to match the non-traditional missions involved. The USAF contribution to meeting the LIC challenge has been successful when the mission matched our capabilities.

Future USAF efforts to deal with low intensity conflict need to focus on improving in four areas. Joint LIC doctrine must be incorporated into our thinking and operations while at the same time developing service-wide capabilities to support LIC operations. With sound doctrine and a capable force, effective joint planning and exercises are required to fully integrate the capabilities of USAF units with each other as well as other services. Once a low intensity conflict operation is initiated, airpower requires centralized command and control of the air units involved to insure unity of purpose, flexibility and the proper application of their capabilities to the objective. USAF units have demonstrated their abilities to operate well in low intensity conflicts of the 1980’s. If we continue to improve on our record, the US Air Force will be ready for the low intensity conflicts of the future.

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